

Wade Lefler, "The Luckless Larruper"

©DiamondsintheDusk.com

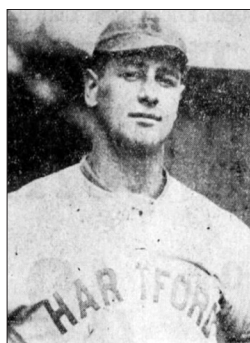
*"Wade Lefler, the Luckless Larruper, Thought He Was Entitled to More World Series Money and Is Again a Minor Leaguer."
- The Sporting News, January 1925*

During the winter of 1924, utilityman extraordinaire and newly-minted lawyer Wade Hampton Lefler considers retirement, but after earning a spring training trial with the Boston Braves, a talent-challenged team coming off a 100-loss season, the North Carolinian decides that if he fails to stick with the Braves that he would return home and begin a law practice.

Lefler makes the Braves' opening day roster and on April 16, becomes the first Duke University alumnus to play in the majors when he pinch hits for starting pitcher Rube Marquard in the sixth inning and strikes out against Hal Carlson in a 4-3 10-inning win over the Philadelphia Phillies.

Seven days later, Lefler is still 0-for-1 when the Braves send him back to the Eastern League's Worcester Panthers, where he had played the year before. He deliberates about his future, but eventually he decides to report.

CAN'T PLAY IN BIG SERIES, BUT HELPED SENATORS GET INTO IT



Lou Gehrig
1924 Hartford Senators

Back in familiar haunts, Lefler wins his second-straight Eastern League batting title, finishing with a .370 average - one point ahead of Hartford's Lou Gehrig - and earns another call-up to the major leagues when the Washington Senators, who are battling the New York Yankees for first-place in the American League, pay Worcester \$7,500 for his services.

Used as a pinch hitter in four of his five games with Bucky Harris' Senators, Lefler is 3-for-4 coming off the bench with two doubles and four RBIs.

On September 27, his three-run double plays a major role in Washington's 7-5 win over the Boston Red Sox that clinches at least a tie for first place. Lefler ends up hitting .556 (5-for-9) with three doubles and four RBIs as the Senators claim their first-ever American League pennant, finishing two games ahead of the New York Yankees.

Being a late-season call-up, Lefler is not eligible for Washington's seven-game World Series victory against the New York Giants.

NEW RECORD FOR WORLD SERIES SET IN 1924 BATTLES

Washington Players Get \$5,730—Wade Lefler Is Remembered,

On October 11, it's announced that the victorious Senators will split \$148,991.63 into 26 shares of \$5,730 each. Trainer Mike Martin, backup third baseman Tommy Taylor and coach Al Schacht each receive two-thirds of a share. Outfielder Wid Matthews, who was sent along with \$50,000 to Sacramento of the Pacific Coast League on August 10 for Earl McNeely, was sent a check for \$1,000.

Lefler?

The players vote to award Frankie Baxter, the team's bat boy, and Lefler each a "lump sum," reported to be \$50 from each of the team's 23 regular players. Many members of the media feel that the players, who are not required to give Lefler or the bat boy anything, were "decidedly liberal," in rewarding \$1,150 to a player with nine at bats and not eligible for the World Series. Lefler's supporters feel that he had delivered several key hits and note the difference in prize money between first and second place.

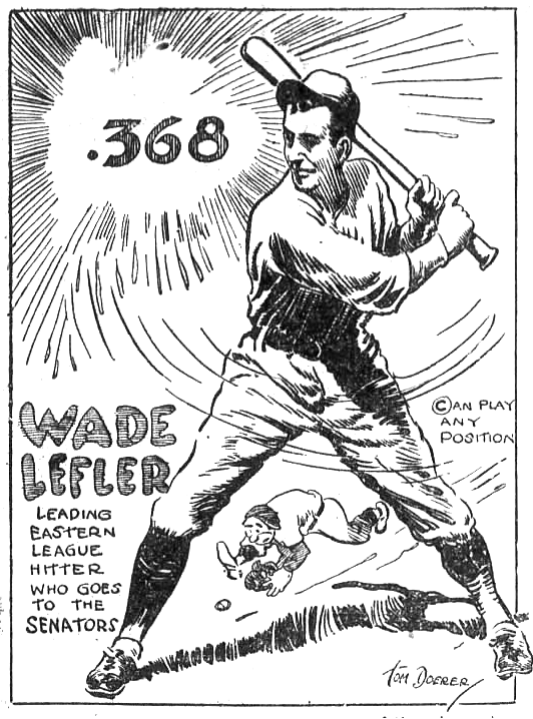
LEFLER ASKS FOR MORE MONEY FROM SENATOR PLAYERS

Utility Man is Peeved Over Amount Paid Him by Teammates

Wade Lefler [2 of 5]:

UP HE GOES

By Tom Doerer



It doesn't take long for the "Battlin' Barrister" to vent his displeasure.

Angry that he did not receive a third or full share and that he received the same amount set aside for the bat boy and clubhouse employees, he seriously considers quitting baseball for his law practice. He also says that he will probably never play with the Senators again, as he figures that his services during the closing month of the campaign were "not fully appreciated," by the players.

On December 4, following his public pronouncement of dissatisfaction (a hot stove league favorite that winter for sure), the Senators send Lefler and Tommy Taylor to Memphis of the Southern League, completing an earlier transaction for third baseman Doc Prothro and 18-year-old pitcher Tom Kelly. Kelly, a 14-game winner for the

Chicks in 1924, will eventually win 284 games in 23 seasons of professional baseball.

The 1925 season with Memphis proves to be his last in professional baseball.

After hitting .309 for the Chicks, he retires from the game and becomes a well-respected attorney in Newton, North Carolina.

Weaver College

Weaver College was a coeducational Methodist institution, that operated from 1873 until 1934 in Weaverville, North Carolina. The college described itself as an "ideal gateway to the responsibilities of university, business or home life," and in 1912 it becomes a junior college and its curriculum was such that its graduates were admitted to the junior class at four-year universities without examination. In 1934, the Methodists combined three small junior colleges in western part of the state. Weaver and Rutherford College were combined with the Brevard Institute, with the new college occupying the grounds at Brevard and is now Brevard College.



In eight minor league seasons, Lefler hits .322 with 142 doubles, 45 triples and 35 home runs. Five times he hits over .300 and twice he captures his league's batting title. In his six major league games, he finishes with a career batting average of .556, and a slugging percentage of .889.

Born on June 5, 1896 in Cooleme, North Carolina, to Charles and Eva May Lefler, he begins his college career at Weaver College, a two-year preparatory institution in Weaverville, North Carolina.

The team's starting catcher in 1914 and 1915, Lefler then matriculates to Trinity College (now Duke University) in Durham and begins the 1916 season there as the Methodists' starting catcher. On March 24, 1916, in an exhibition game with the International League's Baltimore Orioles at Woodall Park in Raleigh, Lefler catches the eye of Orioles' manager Jack Dunn when he is 3-for-5 with a triple and a home run.



Wade Lefler
1921 Baltimore Orioles

The 1921 Tip Top Bread Baltimore Orioles' 19-card set was not widely known to the general public until some of the cards were put up for auction in 2009. The set was distributed on a very limited basis within the Baltimore area. The cards were included in Tip Top loaves of bread with a different player was issued each day. It is not known how long the promotion continued. The cards in this condition-sensitive set measure 3-1/4 by 5-1/2 and are sepia-toned images with a white/cream-colored border. The player's name and position are printed at the bottom as are the words, "Baltimore Orioles 1921." The backs of the cards are blank. The Lefty Grove (spelled Groves) card (rated fair) was recently sold for \$30,260. This is Lefler's only card and is graded SGC 20 Fair 1.5.

Wade Lefler [3 of 5]:

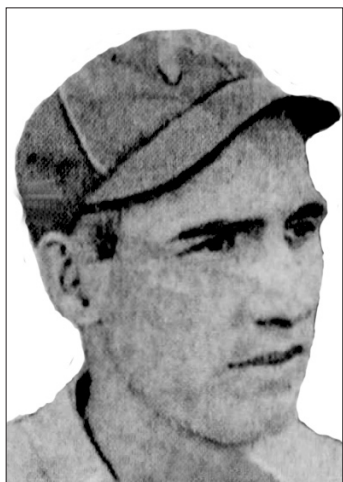
Wade Lefler Year by Year:

Year	Team	League	Level	W-L	Finish	Age	AB	R	HT	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	SLUG	OPS	AVG
1914	Weaver College Methodists		College	-	-	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--
1915	Weaver College Methodists		College	-	-	19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--
1916	Trinity College Methodists		College	6-17-2	-	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.220
1917	Trinity College Methodists		College	3-9-1	-	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--
1917	Baltimore Orioles	International	AA	88-61	3 of 8	22	5	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	.000	.000	.000
1918	US Army		Military			22	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--
1919	Baltimore Orioles	International	AA	100-49	1 of 8	23	231	35	65	10	1	1	-	5	.346	.627	.281
1920	Baltimore Orioles	International	AA	109-44	1 of 8	24	280	39	94	13	3	4	-	2	.446	.780	.336
1921	Baltimore Orioles	International	AA	119-47	1 of 8	25	396	71	125	19	5	3	-	3	.412	.728	.316
1922	2 Teams	2 Leagues	AA-B			26	419	52	104	14	6	2	-	7	.325	.573	.248
	Newark Bears	International	AA			26	228	26	59	7	4	0	-	3	.325	.584	.259
	Augusta Tygers	South Atlantic	B			26	191	26	45	7	2	2	6	4	.325	.551	.236
1923	Worcester Panthers	Eastern	A			27	417	78	154	26	7	8	-	5	.523	.892	*.369
1924	2 Teams	2 Leagues	MLB			28	9	0	5	3	0	0	4	0	.889	1.444	.556
1924	Boston Braves	NATIONAL	MLB	53-100	8 of 8	28	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.000	.000	.000
1924	Worcester Panthers	Eastern	A			28	568	104	*210	30	11	14	-	8	.535	.905	*.370
1924	Washington Senators	AMERICAN	MLB	92-62	1 of 8	28	8	0	5	3	0	0	4	0	1.000	1.625	.625
1925	Memphis Chickasaws	Southern	A			29	489	79	150	30	12	3	-	10	.436	.743	.307
Major League Totals		1 Season					9	0	5	3	0	0	4	0	.889	1.444	.556
Minor League Totals		8 Seasons					2805	0	902	142	45	35	0	0	.443	.765	.322

*Denotes league leader; +Denotes league champion via post-season playoff

ML Debut with Boston Braves - April 16, 1924, at Baker Bowl, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: pinch hits for starting pitcher Rube Marquard in the top of the sixth inning and strikes out against righthander Hal Carlson in a 4-3 win in 10 innings over the Philadelphia Phillies.

ML Finale with the Washington Senators - September 30, 1924, at Fenway Park, Boston, Massachusetts: starts in rightfield and bats fourth; goes 2-for-4 with a double, against Alex Ferguson (single) and Howard Ehmke (double), has two putouts, in a 13-1 loss to the Boston Red Sox.



Wade Lefler
1922 Newark Bears

A couple of days later, Dunn decides to forego an Orioles' intrasquad scrimmage to watch Lefler in Trinity's season opener against Wake Forest. In a 4-3 win over the visiting Baptists, Lefler is 1-for-2 with a pair of runs scored. After six games, Lefler is hitting .368, but soon afterwards he breaks his hand and finishes the season hitting a lowly .220, which plays a large role in the team's 6-17-2 record.

Following his senior season at Duke, Lefler returns home to Cooleemee where wears the shin guards for a local amateur team. Baltimore stays after the talented receiver, and eventually Oriole pitcher Doc Newton, a fellow North Carolinian who had crossed the border to play collegiately at the University of South Carolina, gets his signature on a contract in early July. On July 9, Lefler dons a Baltimore uniform, and in his first game he is a victim of sunstroke and has to be carried from the field. Despite rarely playing, he travels with the team the remainder of the season,

managing to get into six games.

On February 25, 1918, both his baseball and educational careers are put on hold when he is inducted into the military in Mocksville, North Carolina, and sent to Camp Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina. He is discharged in the Spring of 1919 with the rank of Lieutenant.

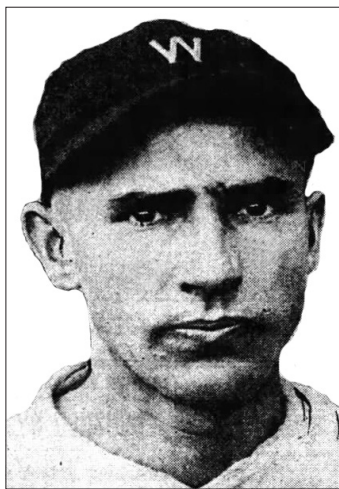
Rejoining Baltimore in time for the start of the season, Lefler is behind the plate for 78 games en route to hitting .281 as Jack Dunn's Orioles win the first of seven-straight International League titles. He hits .336 in 1920 and .316 in 1921. His time behind the plate drops to 38 games in 1921.



LEFLER JOINS GRIFFMEN FOR PINCH-HITTING TRIAL

PHILADELPHIA, September 11. —Wade Henry Lefler, Worcester outfielder and first baseman, who has been leading the Eastern League at batting, reported to the Nationals today for trial. If Lefler demonstrates his batting ability to the satisfaction of Manager Harris, he will be signed for use as a pinch batter during the remainder of the season.

Lefler is no youngster in baseball, having been in pro ranks for several seasons. He is 27 years old, and has had a couple of trials with the Braves, but was turned back to the minors because of a weak throwing arm. He is nearly six feet tall and weighs about 180 pounds.



Wade Lefler
1924 Washington Senators

A year later Lefler suffers an arm injury in spring training forcing him to the outfield, then first base. Late in the season he returns to behind the plate, before going down with a broken thumb in early August. Injuries withstanding, the 1921 Orioles win 119 games and finish 20 games ahead of second-place Rochester. In that year's Junior World Series against Louisville of the International League, Lefler hits .444 in a seven-game loss to the Colonels.

With his continuing arm problems, on the December 20, 1921, the Orioles trade Lefler to the Newark Bears for outfielder Jimmy Walsh. An unhappy Lefler is hitting .259 for the Bears when he is purchased on the Fourth of July by the Augusta Tygers of the South Atlantic League.

One of at least 60 players to suit up for Augusta that summer, Lefler hits only .236 for the Tygers and finishes the season with a career-low .248 batting

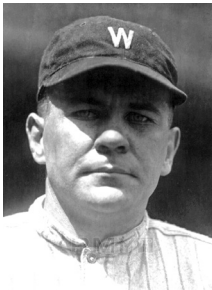
average between the two teams. After the end of the season, Augusta sends Lefler to the Worcester Panthers of the Eastern League and it is there that the left-handed hitting lawyer will have the two best seasons of his career.

Coming off a subpar 1922 campaign, but now armed with a law degree from Duke, Lefler joins the team on June 3. He has a comeback season or major proportions, leading the league in hitting with a .369 average, beating out New Haven's Elmer Bowman by

three points. On September 1, Lefler is one of three Worcester players whose contracts are purchased by the Boston Braves.

Elmer Bowman

Heading into the final weekend of the 1923 season, New Haven's popular first baseman Elmer Bowman is looking to make it back-to-back Eastern League batting titles. On the morning of September 20, Bowman (.369257) trails Worcester's Wade Lefler (.369304) by the narrowest of margins, with teammate George "Showboat" Fisher a close third. In that afternoon's game with the first-place Hartford Senators, Bowman is hitless in five plate appearances against a 20-year-old lefty by the name of Lou Gehrig, who is making his pro pitching debut. Lefler sits out the Panthers' final three games while Bowman is 2-for-11 against Gehrig and a season-ending doubleheader with Springfield. Lefler captures the first of two batting crowns with his .369 average while Bowman (.366) is second and Fisher (.365) third. Although Bowman's major league career consisted of just two at bats with the Washington Senators in 1920, the Vermont native hits over .300 in eight of his 11 minor league seasons, including Eastern League batting titles in 1922 (.365) and 1926 (.377).



During the off-season, Lefler is said to have considered retiring. With spring training coming up, he decides that if he fails to stick with the Braves that he would return home and take up his law practice. But, Lefler makes Boston's opening day roster and on April 16 becomes the first Duke alumnus to play in the majors when he pinch hits for starting pitcher Rube Marquard in the sixth inning and strikes out against right-hander Hal Carlson in a 4-3 win in 10 innings over the Philadelphia Phillies. Lefler is still 0-for-1 when seven days later, the Braves send him back to Worcester.

FORTUNE FAILS TO SMILE ON WADE LEFLER

Sixty Ball Players Have Worn The Tyger Uniform During 1922 Season

Local Management Has Registered Enough Ball Tossers to
Win a War With Yet Records Show They Have Not
Nearly Won a Pennant—Officials Have
Been Untiring in Efforts

(By HUGH KINCHLEY)

While men enough to win a war have worn the uniform of the Augusta baseball team since the commencement of the 1922 season of the South Atlantic League, they haven't been enough to even come close to winning a pennant.

Looking backward through the past few months to the opening of the training season in Augusta, it is discovered that a small army of ball players, of all shapes, sizes and descriptions, have at one time or another played ball or were given try-outs by the Tyger management.

And while all the abundance of talent has not succeeded in producing a winning ball club, it must be admitted that the owners of the Augusta team have made unceasing efforts to gather together a winning combination.

An incomplete list shows the names of upward of sixty ball players who have at one time or another been the property of the local team since the change in ownership last spring.

Out of the multitude who came, there are none left of the men who were of last year's team, and only three members of the Tygers as they line up today were in Augusta uniforms when the Sally season began last April. Tengen, Holloway and Poole are the sole survivors. Of these, Walter Tengen is the only one who has been with the club since the opening of the training season. Holloway was signed while the team was indulging in preseason practice, and Poole was purchased from Rochester a few days before the league season opened.

Here They Are

The list to date contains these names:
Neal Ball
Troy Agnew
J. P. Livingston
Paul Nichols
D. V. Connelly
Mike Roman
Artie Black
Bill Holden

Orion Masters
Nelly Meis
Guy Benson
Walter Tengen
Wilbur Davis
William Nolan
Vincent Walsh
Bill Weidell
Sam Martin
Art Trefry
Doc Bass
Roy Ramsey
Sam Johnson
Royce Davis
L. H. Miller
Frank Landy
Arnold Poole
Kenneth Holloway
Forest Cady
Harry O'Neill
Sherman Klefer
Alwood Gordy
Herbert Merritt
Atwood Palmer
Ed Handley
Rufus Clarke
Curtis Daughton
J. B. Matthews
Dan Neome

Bill Lee
Wm. O'Hearn
Paul Schanlegh
Wm. Weisskopf
Claude Satterfield
Wade Lefler
George Johnston
Harry Swacina
Raymond Boll
Charlie Gooch
Frank Landrath
M. A. Greenwald
H. E. Caraway
Ward Mast
Bob Kirke
Joe Fillingham
B. A. Graves
Bill Crockett
Ed McLaughlin
Wm. Bethune
Frank Larkey
Bill Newton
Broadway Jones
Vance Graber
Bill Dreyman
Foster Rhodes
"Red" Bolton
Bill Cotton

Besides these, and some few others whose names may have been overlooked, could be included Herman, who was turned over to the Tygers by the Detroit club and refused to report; Spencer, who was switched to Omaha; Camp, who has been purchased from the Henderson club, and is expected to report any day, and Damm, now catching for Greenville, who will come to the Tygers later on.

Such an array of names testifies to the stupendous effort that those who are at the head of the club have made in the desire to get a ball team that would satisfy the fans.

It also represents the expenditure of a considerable amount of money, as the cost of transportation in bringing the players to and from Augusta is of itself an item that mounts up into quite a few thousand dollars.

The lovers of baseball in Augusta have a chance of showing their appreciation by a continuance of their patronage for the few remaining days of play at Warren Park.

Wade Lefler [5 of 5]:

Back in familiar haunts, Lefler wins his second-straight Eastern League batting title, finishing with a .370 average - one point ahead of Hartford's Lou Gehrig - and earns another call-up to the major leagues when the Washington Senators, who are battling the New York Yankees for first-place in the American League, pay Worcester \$7,500 for his services.

Used as a pinch hitter in four of his five games, Lefler is 3-for-4 coming off the bench with two doubles and four RBIs. On September 27, his three-run double plays a major role in Washington's 7-5 win over the Boston Red Sox that clinches at least a tie for league laurels for the Senators. Lefler ends up hitting .556 (5-for-9) with three doubles and four RBIs as the Senators end up two games ahead of the Yankees and claim their first-ever American League pennant.

1924 Washington Senators



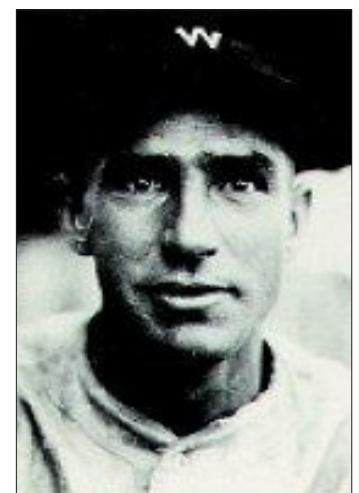
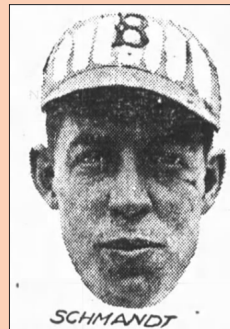
Top Row (L-R): Firpo Marberry, p; Ralph Miller, 2b; Curley Ogden, p; Joe Martina, p; Tom Zachary, p; Walter Johnson, p; Goose Goslin, lf; Mule Shirley, 1b; Wade Lefler, of; Tommy Taylor, of. Middle Row: Allen Russell, p; Ossie Bluege, 3b; Roger Peckinpaugh, ss; Manager Bucky Harris, 2b; Joe Judge, 1b; Sam Rice, rf; Bennie Tate, c; George Mogridge, p. Bottom Row: Paul Zahniser, p; B. Speece, p; Pinky Hargrave, c; Nemo Liebold, cf; Griffith, mascot; Al Schacht coach; Earl McNeely, cf; Nick Altrock coach; Muddy Ruel, c; Mike Martin, trainer.



Despite hitting .307 with 30 doubles, 12 triples and a career-high 10 stolen bases, Lefler is considered a failure by some Southern papers.

On February 16, 1926, Lefler request Memphis to put him on the retired list.

Ten days later, Memphis purchases veteran first baseman Ray Schmandt from Indianapolis. Schmandt will hit .302 as Lefler's successor in 1926. In March, Nashville Smokies' manager Colonel Frank Moffett tells the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* that he is "about to land" Lefler to be his first baseman.



Wade Lefler
1924 Washington Senators

On April 1, the Eastern League's New Haven Profs announce that they have purchased Lefler's contract. Lefler declines the Profs offer.

Following his playing days he opens a law office in Newton, North Carolina and is known as the "Dean of Newton Attorneys." For a five-year span (1928-1933), he plays for the Newton Indians in six-team semipro Western Carolina League, a circuit comprised primarily of college players.

He later serves as the Newton City Attorney and clerk of the Catawba County Superior Court. Lefler dies on March 6, 1981, at the age of 84 in Hickory, North Carolina.