On the morning of September 9, 1921, Baseball Commissioner Judge Kanesaw Mountain Landis issues a decision that rocks the foundation of the Virginia (B) League, one of baseball’s more stable minor league circuits, when he rules that the league’s two North Carolina franchises - Rocky Mount and Wilson - have exceeded the league’s player salary limit and awards the first-half championship to third-place Portsmouth.

In a telegram to League President W.B. Bradley, Landis writes:

“Investigation has disclosed that Rocky Mount violated salary league limitation in the Virginia League constitution. Therefore, the league’s action in awarding the pennant for the first half season to Rocky Mount is hereby set aside. Wilson, having violated the same provision, pennant for the first half is awarded to Portsmouth, that club being next in the standing of the clubs, and there being no intimation that it did not obey the constitution.”

Landis’ decision only confirms what fans of the 16-year-old league have suspected since mid-May, and caps a year of family squabbles, a less-than-popular league president, lawsuits, player, manager and fan disputes and franchise relocation.

With that said, unless you were a Portsmouth Trucker fan, the 1921 season was one to forget.

**1921 Virginia League Chronology**

January 3
The new year gets off to a rocky start when a meeting of the Virginia League’s franchise committee is delayed for three days at the request of President William B. Bradley, who asks for more time to complete negotiations with possible new owners for the Richmond franchise.

January 7
Richmond sells star first baseman Jim Poole to the Portland Beavers for “quite a bit of kale”. One of six major leaguers from Lenior-Rhyne College in Hickory, North Carolina, Poole hit .302 with 30 doubles and 14 triples for the Colts in 1920.

January 10
The situation in Richmond appears settled when it is announced that former team owner and theatrical magnate Jake Wells will assume ownership of the franchise and be awarded the rights to the players reserved by the league office when the franchise was forfeited by its previous owner B.W. Wilson. Wells indicates that he plans to build a new baseball park on Mayo’s Island.
January 11
Confusion reigns once more in the Commonwealth when Jake Wells refuses to officially announce that he is taking over ownership of the Richmond team, thus placing the league's primary franchise back in limbo. In addition, team owners are unhappy with the performance of league president W.B. Bradley and have been trying to get rid of him since the start of the 1920 season. Former major leaguer Al Orth is rumored to have the inside track for the position.

Norfolk owner C. Moran Berry, before going duck hunting with manager Jack Warhop, announces that he has secured land and that his team will play in a new park this coming summer.

January 13
League owners are now publicly in favor of retaining W.B. Bradley as league president for the 1921 season.

January 20
In a four-hour meeting at the Murphy Hotel in Richmond, league “moguls” formally approve Jake Wells’ purchase of the city’s baseball franchise. At the meeting, former major league pitcher “Doc” White makes a last minute bid to buy the Richmond franchise, but is turned down.

January 28
On the same day that Newport News pitcher George Morgan, who was 16-10 with a 1.84 ERA for the Shipbuilders in 1920, signs with the Philadelphia Phillies, Virginia Tech's basketball team beats Washington & Lee, 23-9, in a game where the losing Generals are “unable to locate the baskets.”

February 12
Petersburg announces that former Boston Brave, Billy Martin, will manage the team the upcoming season. The club, heretofore known as the Goobers, will be called the Trunkmakers in 1921.

February 18
League directors formally adopt a 138-game schedule to begin April 21 and end on September 24. In addition, any team dropping out of the league will forfeit their $2,000 franchise fee. Richmond is told that they will be required to build a baseball park on Mayo Island costing not less than $60,000, and it must be ready for the opening of the season, two months hence.

March 13
Rocky Mount secretary M.P. Dawson makes a trip to Baltimore and signs six players from the highly-regarded Baltimore Dry Dock team. Signing with the Tar Heels are outfielders Johnny Bates and Ben Spencer, first baseman Lefty Russell, pitcher Harry Johnson and pair of middle infielders in Jim Curry and Elliott.

1921 Virginia League • Statistical Leaders

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MANAGER ‘RYAN RECEIVES LETTER’ FROM HOPEFUL

Ray Ryan, manager of the Richmond Colts, has received a letter from a budding youngster way out in Indiana who desires to play for the Colts. The letter, which is bona fide, reached the local pilot through the mail several days ago.

It follows: . . .

Dear Str,—Please send me a contract to play baseball with Richmond, Virginia, in Virginia State League. Batting average, .556; fielding average, .546. Height, 5 feet 11 inches tall. Weight, 175 pounds. Please send me a ticket to come on. Please send me a contract and ticket. My terms are $3,500 a month. Please send me a little advance money, about $200. I will sign contract by signing the same. Hoping to hear from you, I remain.

Yours very truly,

FRANK HETTON
307 North D Street
Richmond, Ind.

ROCKY MOUNT CLUB IS GETTING STRONG TEAM

Six Baltimore Dry Dock Players Signed By Tar Heels In Virginia League

Dawson proves to be a keen eye of talent as Spencer will total 50 doubles and lead the team in hitting (.357) while Johnson finishes 17-5. However, the National Association of Minor League clubs rule that Bates, a former major leaguer, will not be allowed to play for Rocky Mount because he had jumped from another minor league club (Mobile) the previous summer.
April 2
Wilson acquires pitcher John Rommel from the Martinsburg of the Blue Ridge League, where he was 4-9 in 1920, after Rommel declines to sign a contract with the Mountaineers. Rommel also decides not to sign with the Bugs and returns home.

April 11
Seven of the eight Virginia League teams and league president W.B. Bradley are named as defendants in a lawsuit filed by Ben Wilson, the former owner of the Richmond franchise. Wilson, who was expelled from the league at a meeting back on November 6, is seeking in excess of $50,000 in damages.

Wilson, who was not at the November meeting, claims that he did not receive notice that he would “be tried” that night and that he did not have an opportunity to prepare a defense. The suit does not involve the current Richmond franchise as it was organized after Wilson ceased to be part of the league.

The problem between Wilson and the other teams began during a league meeting in October, 1920, where the schedule for the 1921 season was discussed. Other owners declined to grant Wilson's request that Richmond be allotted more Saturday home dates than other teams and the meeting ends without an agreement.

At the November meeting, the attending owners sought to have Wilson post a $2,000 forfeit fee and accept a schedule as they might draft that night. Reached by long distance telephone, Wilson declines to post the forfeit fee. Following that decision, the league “confiscated” eight Richmond players (valued at $30,000 by Wilson) and the rights to the franchise.

April 21- The Season Opens
Following a tumultuous preseason, the Virginia League opens its 16th season with a four game slate.

Rocky Mount beats Wilson, 6-5, in 10 innings before a Tar Heel record crowd of 4,000 with William “Lefty” Loach picking up the first of his 11 wins. Portsmouth tops Norfolk 7-6 in a “poorly played and slow game.” Newport News totals 16 hits, including a home run by center fielder John Hupfer (his only one of the season) and hands visiting Suffolk a 6-3 setback before 5,000 fans. Shortstop Billy Martin goes 2-for-3 with a home run to lead Petersburg past Richmond 6-5 before 7,500 in brand-new Mayo Island Park.

April 24
The Philadelphia Athletics release 22-year-old pitcher Jack Slappey to Rocky Mount. Slappey, a University of Georgia product, appears in three games for Connie Mack’s Athletics in 1920, finishing 0-1 with a 7.11 ERA. The 6-foot-4 Slappey is 11-18 for the Tar Heels in the best season of his seven-year minor league career where fashions a 34-77 mark before ending with a 3-14 slate for the Reading Keystones of the International (AA) League in 1927.

Ed Hock
Wheelerburg, Ohio, native Ed Hock makes his minor league debut with the Richmond Colts almost nine months to the day after making his major league debut with the St. Louis Cardinals. Signed off of an independent team from Portsmouth, Ohio, Hock breaks into the big leagues on July 8, 1920, as a late inning replacement for Cardinal left fielder Jack Smith in a 14-2 loss to the Brooklyn Robins. In a lengthy 22-year minor league career, Hock totals 3,474 hits. Hock dies at the age of 64 after drowning in the Ohio River on November 21, 1963.

Jack Slappey
University of Georgia
1921 Virginia League [4 of 8]:

April 29
Richmond beats visiting Wilson 11-4. Three Colts - catcher Dutch Greenae, left fielder John Keller and pitcher Robert Howe - each homer over the short left-field wall, and Howe scatters 11 hits en route to picking up his initial win of the season.

April 30
Rocky Mount's William "Lefty" Loach moves to 3-0 on the year with a complete game eight-hit 6-2 win over visiting Petersburg.

May 2
In a pitcher's duel, Suffolk lefty Dennis Burns pitches a four-hit 1-0 shutout of visiting Petersburg.

May 5
Rocky Mount's "Lefty" Loach runs his record to 4-0 and the Tar Heels move over .500 (6-5) with a 2-1 road win at Suffolk. The Harvard athletic committee bans the playing of Sunday tennis matches on campus because the tennis courts are within 1,000 feet of a church.

"The umpire says 'play ball,' but the scores show that lots of the teams ought to be fined for disobedience."
- Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch

May 12
Suffolk's Art Johnson hurls a five-hit complete game as the Wildcats snap Rocky Mount's Lefty Loach's four-game win streak with a 9-1 win.

May 14
Wilson second baseman Wilson "Rasty" Walters collects seven hits - five singles and two doubles - in seven at bats in a 12-inning 8-6 win over Portsmouth.

May 17
Returning home from a six-day road trip, Wilson sends James Joliff to the mound against first-place Richmond. Joliff, a product of the Richmond sandlots and a 15-game winner for the Bugs the year before, responds by shutting out the first-place Colts on two hits in a 3-0 victory.

June 22
Outfielder Dick Miller goes 2-for-4 and becomes the first player ever to hit a ball out of the Wilson ballpark, leading the Bugs to a 4-3 win over visiting Norfolk. For Miller, the home run is one of only two he will hit during the course of the season.

June 23
Rocky Mount receives an unanticipated boost to their pennant chances when the Philadelphia Athletics release outfielder Frank Walker to the Tar Heels for the remainder of the season. Walker is hitting .227 with one home run and six RBIs for the Athletics at the time of his demotion. In 77 games for Rocky Mount, the Randolph-Macon College product will hit .355 with 23 doubles, six triples and nine home runs. Suffolk's Dennis Burns pitches both ends of a doubleheader against visiting Richmond, winning the opener 3-1 before losing the second game 6-3.

June 30
President W.B. Bradley dismisses Wilson's appeal to have the last two innings of its game with Richmond played the next time the two teams are in the Capital City. With Bradley's dismissal, Richmond claims a 6-4 victory in a game that last lasted only seven innings back on June 18.

Roy Meeker
Coming off an 11-win season with the Columbus Senators of the American Association a year earlier, lefty Roy Meeker dies of a heart attack in his hotel room at the age of 28 following a morning workout at the Cincinnati Reds' spring training camp in Orlando. Meeker spends parts of three seasons with the Reds and Philadelphia Athletics, compiling an 8-14 record with a 4.73 earned run average. A 113-game winner in eight minor league campaigns, the Lead Mine, Missouri, native is tied for second among Virginia League pitchers in wins with a 22-14 mark.

Dennis Burns
1924 Philadelphia Athletics
1921 Virginia League [5 of 8]:

July 1
Less than 24 hours later, league directors overturn Bradley’s decision on the disputed Wilson/Richmond game and decide that should the game have a bearing on the first half standings, that the final two innings of the game be played the next time the two teams are in Richmond on July 19. Trailing 6-4 in the eighth inning, if Wilson rallies they will be crowned first half champion, a Colt win would give Rocky Mount the first half title.

The directors order the game to be replayed with the same pitchers and field players, just as they were when the game was called.

July 2 - The first half ends and the trouble begins
On the final day of the season’s first half, Wilson beats Suffolk 3-0, on James Joliff’s third shutout of the year, and moves into a first-place tie with Rocky Mount which drops an 8-4 decision to Norfolk. The Bugs and the Tar Heels are deadlocked with identical 38-25 records.

July 9
At a league meeting in Petersburg, where newspaper men are excluded, it is charged that both Rocky Mount and Wilson have exceeded the salary limit by more than $1,000 per month.

July 14
In a morning announcement, the Virginia League assumes control of the struggling Petersburg Trunkmakers. League president W.B. Bradley orders that all games scheduled for Petersburg be transferred to the home fields of the opposing clubs and the franchise’s $2,000 guarantee be forfeited to the league to assist in paying the player’s salaries. By mid-afternoon, Petersburg president Crutchfield denies that he has surrendered the club to league office or that he consented to the transfer of future games.

July 16
Two days after the league reportedly assumes control of the Petersburg franchise and just hours before a new of investors are to leave for Norfolk to post a forfeit fee to take over ownership of the team, the grandstand of the Trunkmakers’ ball park is destroyed by a fire.

July 20
The salary issue rears its ugly head once again as league president W.B. Bradley calls for another meeting to be held in three days to discuss the issue of certain clubs exceeding the salary limit.

Wilson manager Tom Clarke, whose Bugs tied with Rocky Mount for the first-half championship with identical 38-25 records, and are 12-3 through the first three weeks of the second half, denies a report by a Norfolk newspaper that in addition to his $700 per month salary ($9,100 per month in today’s market place) he is also receiving rent, water and lights for free.

“*If the doubting Thomases who wish to be convinced will communicate with my landlord, R.V. Moss and City Clerk T.A. Hinnant, they will find that I pay my bills when they become due.*”

- Tom Clarke
1921 Virginia League [6 of 8]:

July 23
Following Wilson’s defeat in the makeup game at Richmond four days earlier, league officials vote by a 4-to-2 margin to award the first half championship to Rocky Mount. Immediately following the vote, Portsmouth and Newport News, upset that both Wilson and Rocky Mount have violated league salary limits, announce that they will “carry the question” to Baseball Commissioner Judge Ken-nessaw Landis.

July 28
It’s official; Faced with mounting debt and a $3,000 repair bill to replace the grandstand that burned down on July 16, Petersburg officials turn the franchise over the league office.

“Tarboro wants to enter the Virginia League and is said to be ready to take up the franchise of the Petersburg club. Tarboro has as much business in the Virginia League as Frank Kugler has in a beauty show for babies. The next thing we know, Aurora will be trying to get Cleveland’s franchise. Tarboro in the Virginia League would look like a pair of tanned oxfords at a formal dance. Last year Tarboro associated with Pinetops and Scotland Neck. This year she wants to associate with Richmond and Norfolk.”
- Washington (N.C.) Daily News

August 1
Ignoring the advice of the Washington Daily News, League president W.B. Bradley awards the North Carolina city of Tarboro the Petersburg franchise.

August 2
Rocky Mount’s Jimmy Woodhead hurls the Virginia League’s first no-hitter of the season when he blanks Norfolk 3-0. Facing only 29 batters, Woodhead allows only four Tars to reach base, two by errors, one on a walk and one when his catcher drops a third strike.

August 11
R.B. Evans, of the Raleigh News & Observer, feels that a 15-game suspension of Wilson first baseman Claude Roth is unwarranted. In a recent game with Portsmouth, it is alleged that Roth “struck” the game’s umpire, but his teammates say that Roth only “shoved” the arbiter.

Roth is ejected from the game, taken to police headquarters and fined $10.

Evans states that it was thought that the matter ended there “inasmuch as other players have administered corporal punishment to umpires who failed to keep their ‘lamps’ properly trimmed” and are not suspended.

Evans goes on to opine that Wilson is “crawling” too close for the comfort of the Virginia teams and it looks as if “the cards are being stacked against the Wilson aggregation.”

League president W.B. Bradley later reduces Roth’s penalty to a mere $100 fine.

Rube Yarrison
One of five 20-game winners in the Virginia League in 1921, Gettysburg College graduate Byron Wardsworth (Rube) Yarrison is 20-13 for the Rocky Mount Tar Heels in 1921. In his college debut on April 11, 1917, Yarrison limits visiting Lafayette College to one single in a 4-1 win. Five years, and two days later (April 13, 1922), Yarrison makes his first start at the major league level, allowing seven runs in four innings and absorbs the loss in a 6-2 defeat to the Boston Red Sox in Fenway Park.

Ben Mallonee
1920 Portsmouth Truckers

Rocks Mount Pitcher
ENTERS IMMORTAL CLASS

Retires League-Leading Tars Without Allowing Semblance of Safe Hit.

Fitches to Only 28 Men

Perfect Record Saved in Ninth Inning, When Spencer Makes Sensational Catch of Vermilyea’s Line Drive.

Norfolk

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Totsals......... 28 0 0 24 17 2

Rocky Mount

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Totsals......... 29 5 8 27 9 3

- Getkert hit for Garten in ninth.
- Score by innings: R
Norfolk........... 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Rocky Mount...... 0 10 100 105—3
1921 Virginia League [7 of 8]:

September 2
Wilson ace right-hander George Quinn is sold to the New York Yankees for $3,000 and is told to report at the end of the Virginia League season.

September 3
Richmond sets a Virginia League single game record for runs scored, besting visiting Newport News 26-1 in a game shortened to seven innings.

September 5
Suffolk's Dennis Burns turns in the second no-hitter of the Virginia League season. Burns walks only one batter and improves to 17-12 with a 6-0 win over Newport News.

September 9
Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Landis over-turns the previous decision of Virginia League officials that awarded the first half championship to Rocky Mount, ruling that Portsmouth is entitled to first half "honors". Both Rocky Mount and Wilson admit that they were over the salary limits.

September 13
Portsmouth sells its leading hitter, outfielder Ben Mallonee, to the Philadelphia Athletics. Mallonee, a 27-year-old Baltimore native, the Truckers' leading hitter with a .338 average, makes his major league debut one day later, striking out against Cleveland Indian right-hander Stan Coveleski in an 8-5 loss.

September 24
Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Landis decides to mediate the Virginia League championship where charges of salary limitations violations have resulted in confusion among league members and a boycott by Wilson business merchants agreeing not to trade with firms from Virginia.

Rocky Mount's business manager Norman Chambliss, meets with Landis with a request for him to investigate the league action of stripping the Tar Heels of their first half championship for violating the salary limit.

October 17
Baseball commissioner Kenesaw Landis promises Newport News president G.S. Barnes that he will "clean house" in the Virginia League, requesting detailed information from all of the clubs as to their salary limits and other arrangements with players for the season just ended.
1921 Virginia League [8 of 8]:

December 12
Virginia League president W.B. Bradley announces that the owners will meet on December 15, to decide what cities will comprise the league next year. It is reported that the three North Carolina franchises - Wilson, Rocky Mount, Tarboro - will be dropped and an all-Virginia circuit will be organized ... Tarboro, which took over the Petersburg franchise on August 2, has surrendered its option while the owners of the Suffolk club dispose virtually all of its players and have indicated that they will not be in the league in 1922.

December 15
Virginia League officials, following a “long drawn out” meeting agree to set a salary limit of $3,000 for the 1922 season and a player limit of 14 men, excluding the manager. The new salary limit is a $200 reduction from the scandal-riddled 1921 campaign.

Also, in a resolution of a lawsuit against the Virginia League and President W.B. Bradley, a court in Richmond awards former Richmond team owner Ben W. Wilson $6,500 in damages. Wilson had sought in excess of $50,000 for the loss of his franchise and roster players.

December 25
The entire Tarboro team is purchased by the Richmond Colts, including manager Ambrose McConnell.

1922
The Virginia League contracts to a six-team circuit in 1922 - Newport News Shipbuilders (63-56), Norfolk Tars (58-57), Portsmouth Truckers (57-61), Richmond Colts (49-68), Rocky Mount Tar Heels (60-61), Wilson Bugs (68-52). Wilson will represent the league in a post-season best-of-seven championship series with the Charleston Pals of South Atlantic League. The Pals defeat the Bugs four games to two.