

Pinch Hits, "Farce in Asheville"

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Asheville, North Carolina - Thirty-one minutes, or 1,860 seconds is all it takes to play a complete nine-inning Class D North Carolina League game on August 30, 1916, between the Winston-Salem Twins and the Asheville Tourists.

The visiting Twins hand the Tourists a 2-1 setback before 200 fans in Asheville's Oates Park (right) en route to becoming the fastest professional baseball nine-inning game ever played, eclipsing by one minute the existing record of 32 minutes set on September 19, 1910 between Mobile and Atlanta of the Southern League.



With both teams needing to catch trains - Asheville a 2:30 to Raleigh and Winston-Salem at "4 bells" for a pending home series with Greensboro - the two managers agree to start the game early, which it does at 1:28, instead of the announced time of 2:00 pm. Because of the early start, the first three innings are played without the game's assigned umpire, former Greensboro manager-turned-arbiter Red Rowe, who arrives at the top of the fourth inning, or 20 minutes prior to the announced starting time. The headline in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* called the game "farical," while Winston-Salem's *Twin-City Daily Sentinel* labels the contest "Season's Prize Farce." An anonymous writer for the *Citizen-Times* opines:

"The ladies objected to the game more than anyone else. Buxom blondes and brunette belles, frauleins and fraus, all pouted in the same breath that it was 'perfectly horrid.' There were about a score of young men who did not share their opinion. Why should they? They were the ball players of course."



Frank Nesser, W-Salem

A two-sport professional athlete, Nesser plays seven years in the minor leagues and in the early years of the National Football League in 1925 and 1926. One of seven brothers to play professional football, the 6-1, 245-pound Columbus, Ohio, product is often compared to Jim Thorpe. An excellent hitter, Nesser fashions a .324 career batting average and bats over .300 in six of his nine minor league seasons. He hits a career-high .385 in his final season as a 33-year-old outfielder with the Saginaw Aces of the Michigan-Ontario (B) League.

Every batter swings at the first pitch and with a hit runs the bases until they are tagged out. No runners are left on base as all three runs come as a result of home runs. Both pitchers lob their tosses and before the final out of an inning "players are on the run changing sides on the field."

Perhaps the game's most unusual play occurs in the top of the third inning, when Asheville pitcher George "Doc" Lowe delivers his pitch before his catcher is behind the plate. An unidentified Winston-Salem hitter lines a single to center field and heads to second when the outfielder's throw heads skips past the second baseman and rolls towards the visitors' dugout. Frank Nesser (left), the Twins' on-deck hitter, grabs the errant toss and throws out his teammate with "a perfect peg" to the keystone bag.

To further confuse matters, no official box score is maintained, "much to the delight of the linotype operators who set the box scores." The only report on the game is the linescore and the team's battery mates.

Interestingly enough, heading into the game, the Twins (29-24) are only four games behind front-running Charlotte (32-19) with six games left to play. However, it appears that the league office never removes the game's result from the record book.

The following week, Asheville owner L.L. Jenkins, who like Umpire Rowe had arrived late to the game, is upset enough that he assures those who were in attendance that the Tourists will fully refund their price of admission.

To this day, the Winston-Salem-Asheville game remains the fastest baseball game in professional baseball history.

SEASON'S PRIZE FARCE IS STAGED IN ASHEVILLE

Twins Won, 2 to 0—No Official
Tab Kept—Players Hit and
Ran Till Tagged Out.

Asheville, Aug. 31.—The Twins from Winston-Salem and Jack Corbett's Tourists staged the prize farce of the season here yesterday afternoon, the visitors finally managing to nose out a victory by a score of 2 to 1. The only glad feature about the whole melee was the fact that the nine innings were reeled off in exactly thirty-one minutes.

Glaxner pitched for Winston-Salem and Lowe for Asheville. Both were hit rather hard, but Lowe was worked on more effectively than was the lad from down Birmingham way. When the players hit the ball they would run until they were tagged out, whether it was between first or second bases or in the outfield. Umpire "Red" Rowe was the only serious man on the field.

The cause of the farce was the lack of time. Asheville had to catch a train at 2:30 o'clock for Raleigh, while the visitors were on the program to leave at 4 bells for Winston-Salem for a series with the Goats.

There were no men left on bases and no errors made. No official score was kept, much to the delight of the linotype operators who set the box scores.

Score by innings: R.
Winston-Salem200 000 000—2
Asheville000 000 100—1
Glaxner and Nance; Lowe and Mack. Umpire: Rowe.