Cover of Steve's article in Rain Check, Spitballing

Rain Check
Baseball in the Pacific Northwest

Edited by Mark Armour
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Spitballing to the Hall of Fame

Colorful contemporaries paved Stan Coveleski's way to majors

"The brand of stuff which Coveleski was putting on the ball may have been anything even here since Big Bill James used to say 'in out two years ago. The Portland tailor simply had the locals eating out of his hand, and he looked like he could keep on doing it all day.'"

— Seattle sportswriter Royal Brougham, quoted in The Oregonian, Sept. 11, 1913

BY STEVE STEINBERG

He came from the mining towns of Shamokin, Pennsylvania, the youngest of five brothers who worked in the mines and played baseball. On his way to a Hall-of-Fame career, he spent three formative years in the Pacific Northwest: 1913-14 with the Spokane Indians of the Northwestern League (NFL) and 1915 with the Portland Beavers of the Pacific Coast League (PCL). Little did Stan Czelewski know that his journey so far from the eastern European hotspot of baseball would put him very much in the middle of larger baseball trends, conflicts, and competition. Following his western trail helped make him an emerging star in the heart of baseball's Deadball Era.

It was a hard life for the youngster at the start of the 20th century. He was born Stanislaw Kowalski in 1889, but he went by Czyclewski as a pro, and dropped the “Z” in the end of his name after his baseball career had ended. "There was nothing strange in those days about a twelve-year old Polish kid in the mines for 75 hours a week at a nickel an hour;" he told baseball historian Larry Bittner. "What was strange was that I ever got out of them."

In four seasons in the Tri-State League, playing with Lancaster and Atlantic City from 1908 to 1912, Czyclewski won 73 games and caught the eye of one of Connie Mack's scouts. Czyclewski made his major league debut in September 1912 for the Athletics and lasted a short stint in his first start. With a surplus of talented pitchers, Mack chose not to offer Czyclewski a contract for 1913. Mack lied he was set with young pitchers Joe Bush and Benny "Duke" Houch. However, who would combine to win 28 games between them for the 1913 Athletics.

In this era, major league teams often had informal relationships with the owners of minor league clubs. Mack had such an understanding with Joe Culey, president and part owner of the Spokane Indians. Culey had sent pitcher Houch to Mack a year earlier, and the pitcher had won eight