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Batter Up, Spokane: Gonzaga College's Early Baseball Years, 1887-1912

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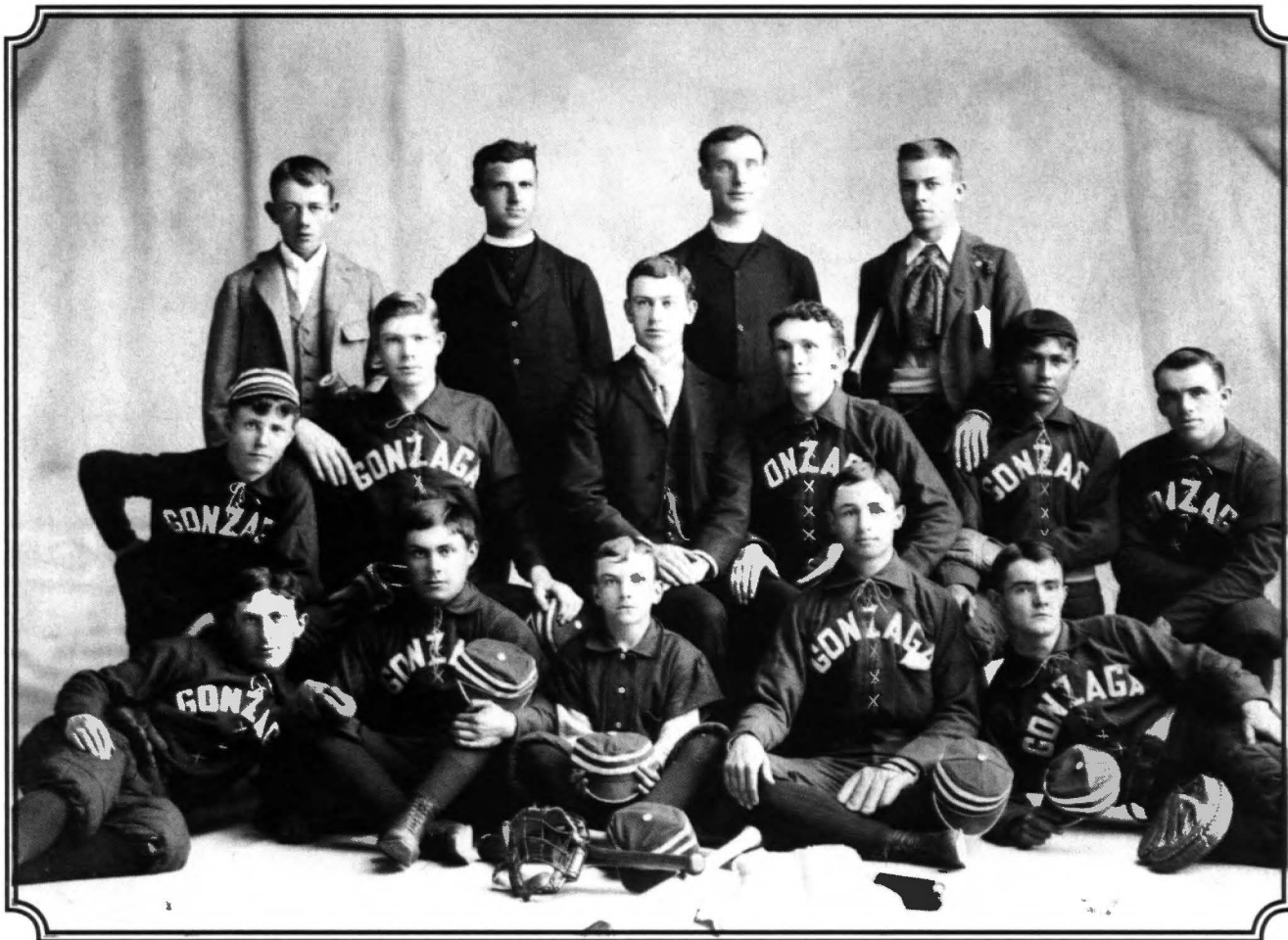
Batter Up, Spokane!

Gonzaga College's Early Baseball Years, 1887 – 1912





STORY BY GONZAGA UNIVERSITY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARIAN
STEPHANIE PLOWMAN
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Pictured above: Gonzaga College Baseball Team, 1895-1896. Pictured on previous page: Gonzaga Baseball, 1910-1911. All photos courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.

From Gonzaga College's humble beginnings in 1887, recreation played an important role in the development of its students. Consequently, athletics began in its early years. Baseball and football were the first team sports offered in the early 1890s followed by basketball in the early 1900s. Since Gonzaga's first students were boys with the minimum age of 10, an intramural sports program was developed. The intramural league for boys under 16 was called Junior Yard Association or JYA. Older boys were in the Gonzaga Athletic Association or GAC.

Many of Gonzaga's students played organized baseball. Even Bing Crosby participated with the JYA and varsity. Football, like baseball, was enjoyed by many of the Gonzaga students. From 1899 - 1907, the football program at Gonzaga was banned due to the concern about injuries. This allowed baseball to be the main sport. Unlike today's collegiate games where teams play in leagues, the Gonzaga teams for many decades played mostly teams from Spokane. Gonzaga's Spokane opponents included Blair Business College, Fort Wright, the YMCA, the Spokane Amateur Athletic Club (S.A.A.C.), the Elks,



Pictured above: Gonzaga College Baseball Team, 1897-1898.

Modern Woodmen of America, and the Spokane Indians.

The first documented Gonzaga baseball game occurred on June 21, 1890. In 1899, with many former baseball stars graduating, there were not enough varsity level players left. These inexperienced teams did not perform well. In response, in March 1900, the Alumni Association of Gonzaga College rallied to the support its alma mater by having former players represent Gonzaga.

On May 6, 1900 the Gonzaga team composed

of these alumni players played against Fort Wright in front of a crowd of 800, the largest crowd to watch a baseball game up to that point. The game won by Gonzaga was played in its new grandstand. As reported in the *Spokesman-Review*: "although they (Fort Wright) put three men in the box (pitcher's mound), they were unable to stem the landslide of slugging that was started in the first inning. ... When the score was counted at the close of the slaughter it stood against the soldiers 31 to 4." A week later Gonzaga beat a team of Spokane plumbers 27 - 7 with the Gonzaga pitcher striking out 15. The athletic alumni team won most of its games. The following



Gonzaga College campus, 1901, with baseball grandstand.

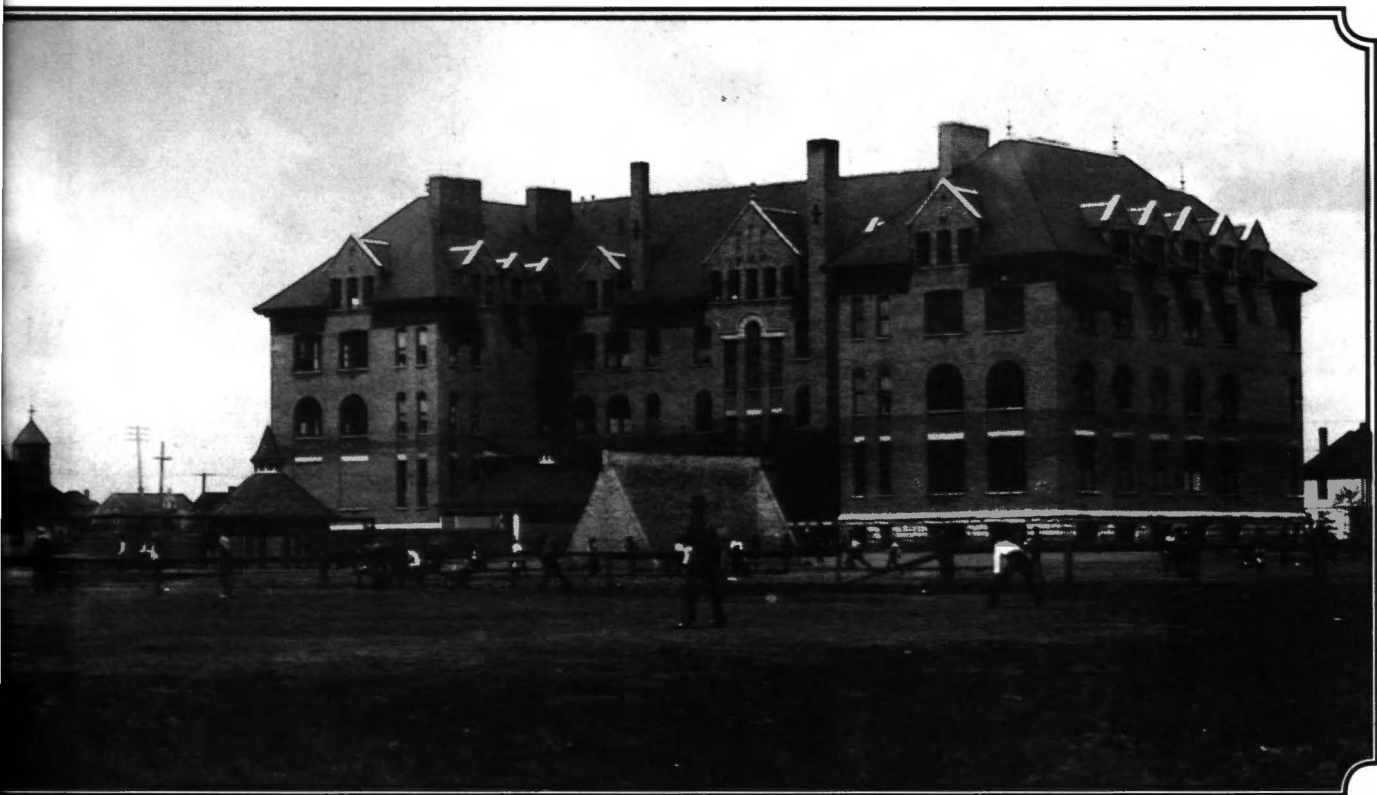
year Gonzaga was able to field a varsity team with just college players.

One frequently played opponent was the Spokane Indians. On April 23, 1906 Gonzaga played against them and lost 24 - 2. Three hundred fans watched the game at Natatorium Park in its new field. The newspaper described the game as "an exhibition of martyrdom on the diamond which is worthy of mention." This game did not keep Gonzaga from playing the Spokane Indians later. One game in March 1909 had 1200 - 1500 people watch the practice pick-up game on the Gonzaga campus. As described in the paper "the crowd swarmed all over the field, jammed four and five feet deep up to the base lines and far down into the outfield, forged out into the territory of the players and bumped into

flying base runners." Although Gonzaga lost 10 - 6, they beat the Indians the next month 7 - 1. Then they played them again the next week and this time the Indians won 11 - 0.

In April 1906, Gonzaga scheduled a benefit game against Whitman. The proceeds of the game went to help the survivors of the San Francisco earthquake and flood. Gonzaga surrendered all of its receipts; Whitman kept only enough to pay for travel.

In the early 1900s there was a rivalry between Gonzaga and Blair Business College. For example, in June 1906 a game was arranged between the two teams' second teams. Each team wanted to be sure of winning the game, since it was their first game of the season. The Blair team decided that the Gonzaga

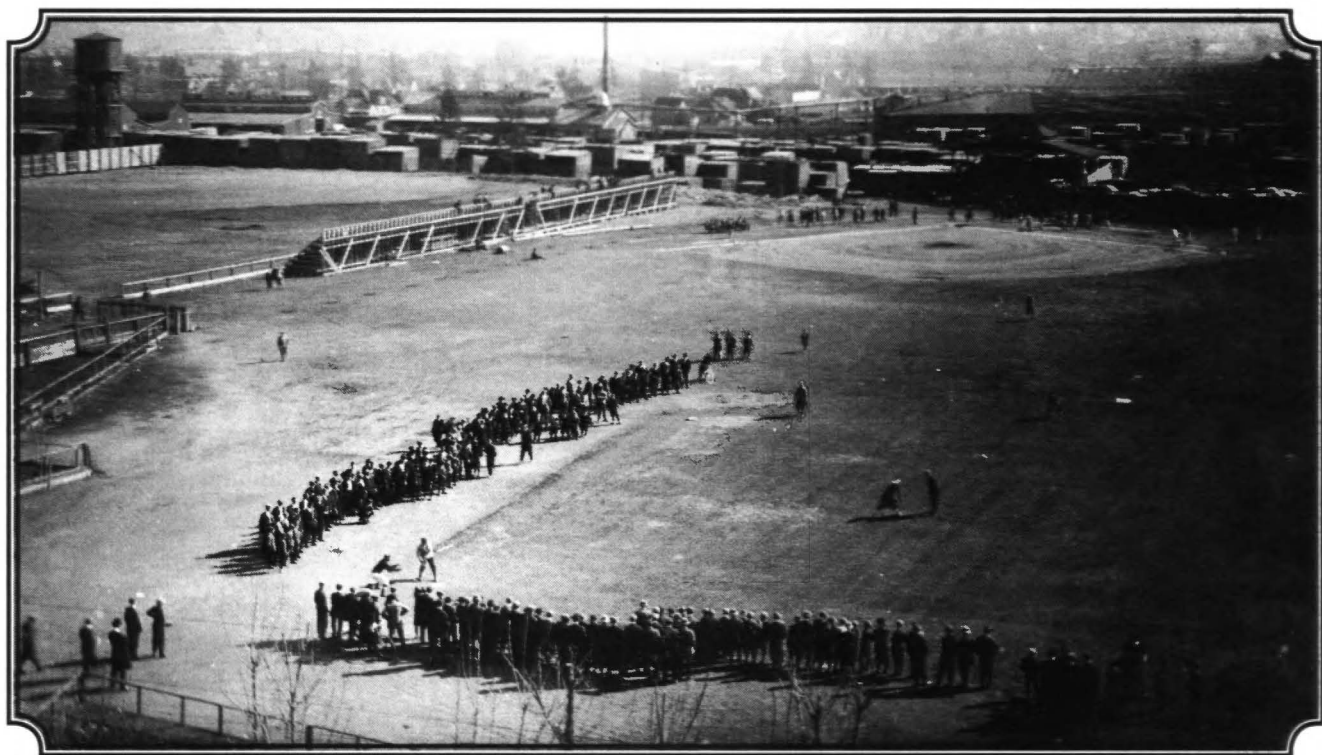


team was going to be too skilled. The Gonzaga captain said that the Blair team was too strong so he was going to put in alumnus Burke to pitch. The Blair players said that they were little boys and wanted to play against players of the same age. After a heated 20 minute discussion in which neither team was willing to give in, the Blair team gathered up their bats and went home.

Gonzaga baseball in its early years had some notable players. One was named Eddie Mulholland. A Montana native Mulholland spent 12 years at Gonzaga, starting as a young boy. Early baseball team photos show him as a mascot on his older brother's teams. He ended up being a multi-sport star athlete and trombonist. By his graduation in 1914, he was the captain of the football, basketball, and baseball teams and a track star. In a March 1909 game against the Spokane Indians, the newspaper described

Mulholland: "a stocky Gonzaga youngster, said to be only 16 years old, is a sweet-looking package behind the bat (catcher position). He was as easy and cool as a veteran, threw to the bases with deadly accuracy and handled his pitchers cleverly." After graduating, he attended Creighton University and became a doctor.

During the May 8, 1910 game at Gonzaga against a Spokane team, the Inlands, a fight broke out. The Spokesman-Review wrote: "The melee was precipitated by a mix up between catcher Mulholland and third baseman Smith of the Inlands as Mulholland was turning third base on a long hit past the outfield. Smith blocked Mulholland. In a minute, Smith was surrounded by angry Gonzaga players, and the more excitable of the spectators of the opposite sides of the controversy rushed into the fray. The crowd closed around the fighters and the scene resembled a street





Pictured top left: Gonzaga College Baseball Team, 1901, with team mascot, Eddie Mulholland seated on first step. Mulholland would later go on to become a multi-sport star athlete, and captain of the football, basketball, and baseball teams. Pictured bottom left: Gonzaga baseball game in 1910. Pictured above: The famous "donnybrook" baseball game where a brawl started on the field after Eddie Mulholland was shoved by an opponent while rounding 3rd base on a homerun on May 8, 1910. Photo shows Jim Moriarty up to bat.

riot. Father Garrigan, who had been senior prefect and always influential with the boys, rushed into the field with his long, black robes making a peculiar spectacle in the mass of fighting men and boys. His demand for order was obeyed quickly and the field soon cleared, but it was impossible to resume the game." Seattle Bishop Edward J. O'Dea saw the fight and game, which Gonzaga won 8 - 4 in the seventh inning.

In the beginning, most of Gonzaga's baseball games were played locally or required less than a day's travel. Gonzaga went on its first overnight road trip in June 1910. Seven games were scheduled over a few days in Moyie, Cranbrook, Fernie and Nelson, British Columbia.

On April 9, 1911, African American soldiers from

Fort Wright beat Gonzaga 3 - 0 on fort grounds. As reported by The Spokesman-Review, "a big crowd saw the game, every soldier at the fort being on the side lines, together with ... a great squad of Gonzaga rooters. The game was excellently patrolled by troopers in arms and the work of the umpires." Gonzaga would redeem herself by beating Fort Wright a couple weeks later 7 - 2.

Over the years, baseball continued to provide a wonderful recreational outlet for Gonzaga students be it competing on a varsity team or on an intramural team. For years to come, Gonzaga's varsity team's opponents would be a mix of local and collegiate teams. It would be years later before Gonzaga would play only collegiate level teams. Consequently, Gonzaga and Spokane are bound together in their development of baseball. ☞