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Don't Forget Jimmy Dygert!

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A member of the Society for American Baseball Research

A forgotten spitball pitcher from the Deadball Era for the legendary Connie Mack, Jimmy Dygert started his trek to the majors by signing with his hometown team of Utica of the New York League in 1903. The following season, he went to Poughkeepsie of the Hudson River League, where even though records weren't chronicled, Jimmy did post an impressive .964 percentage along the way in helping Poughkeepsie win the pennant.

Dygert's services were acquired by the New Orleans Pelicans of the Southern Association for 1905. With the Pels, Jimmy gained notoriety in an early exhibition game with the American League champions, the Boston Americans (Red Sox). Dygert handcuffed Boston and the great Cy Young at Athletic Park in New Orleans, 6-4 on 7 hits, while fanning 4. During that same season, Pel fans witnessed Dygert recording a 18-4 record in 24 contests, and because of the last of the yellow fever outbreak in New Orleans, saw the birds win the Southern Association flag on the road.

After posting a 10-13 record with the A's in his first full year in 1906, Dygert reached his high-water mark the following season in wins with 21* -- third best in the Junior Circuit. Also that same year, the A's found themselves fighting the Detroit Tigers for the American League pennant.

With the season nearing the end, starting pitchers Chief Bender and Jack Coombs laid up with assorted maladies, and Rube Waddell out with inconsistencies in his pitching, (or was he chasing fire trucks?), Mack was forced to use Eddie Plank and Dygert for the stretch run.

In one of the most amazing pitching performances ever, Dygert shut out the Cleveland Indians twice in iron man fashion (4-0 and 8-0 on October first and third) and a day later, shut out the Washington Senators, 8-0. Three shutouts in four days! A feat duplicated a year later by Walter Johnson of the Nats against the New York Highlanders (Yankees). Dygert held both Cleveland and Washington to just 11 safeties, striking out 24 while holding both teams to an anemic .121 average.

Even with a brilliant performance by Dygert and a loss by Plank to Walter Johnson, the Athletics finished 1.5 games behind pennant-winning Detroit.

It is the opinion of this historian, after careful research into the games Dygert pitched against the aforementioned teams, it is indeed the most outstanding feat ever, especially during a stretch run as compared to Johnson's feat, when both teams had no where to go in the standings.

The following season saw Dygert's record slipped to 11-15 while issuing a league leading 97 walks in 239 innings, due to the effects of his spitter. The next year, 1910, Dygert finished with 4-

4 mark. even though he saw no action in the Fall classic against Frank Chance's Chicago Cubs, Dygert witnessed his pitching mates, Jack Coombs and Chief Bender help defeat the Cubs in five games.

By 1911, Dygert was back in the minors, this time with Baltimore of the Eastern League, where he registered a 25-25 mark along with a league leading 218 strikeouts.

After stops in Baltimore, Providence, New Orleans, Milwaukee, Toledo, Chattanooga and finally Beaumont, Dygert hung up his glove and retired. He found employment as a handyman with New Orleans Public Service before succumbing to pneumonia at 52 in 1936. He is interred in Greenwood Cemetery in New Orleans.

* - There are a few sources that state Dygert won 20 games in 1907. Other sources such as MacMillan Encyclopedia and Total Baseball (The official Book of Major League Baseball), state Dygert went 21-8 that season. We will go with the findings according to Total Baseball 2001.

Jay Gauthreaux is a published writer with several publications, Oldtyme Baseball News, Bleacher Creature Newsletter, and various publications throughout the United States. He roots passionately for the New York Yankees.

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