

Baseball on Staten Island

By Freddy Berowski

Staten Island has a long, storied connection to our national game. The borough has hosted major and minor league teams as well as thousands of semi-pro and amateur teams. Twenty-one Staten Islanders have joined the ranks of Major League Baseball and the island has been home to several major league stars.

Formally organized in 1872, the Staten Island Cricket and Baseball Club was made up of a large contingent of Staten Islanders who had previously played with St. George's Cricket Club of Hoboken, New Jersey. Tired of the long travel to partake in the national game, they established grounds at Camp Washington alongside the St. George Ferry.

In 1886 and 1887 Staten Island played host to a major league franchise. After the 1885 season, the American Association's New York Metropolitans, or Mets for short, moved from the Polo Grounds in Manhattan to the St. George Cricket Grounds in Staten Island. The team finished in next to last place in each of those two seasons before folding. The remnants of the franchise were purchased by the Brooklyn Dodgers who took on the contracts of several of the Mets' more skilled players. The St. George Cricket Grounds was as modern a ballpark you could find at the time. It included a double-deck, grandstand that accommodated 4,400 fans, the longest of its kind at the time, and baseball's most luxurious restaurant which featured windows allowing patrons to dine without missing a minute of the action. The St. George Cricket Grounds was located close to the current home of the Yankees the Staten Island Yankees, Richmond County Bank Ballpark.

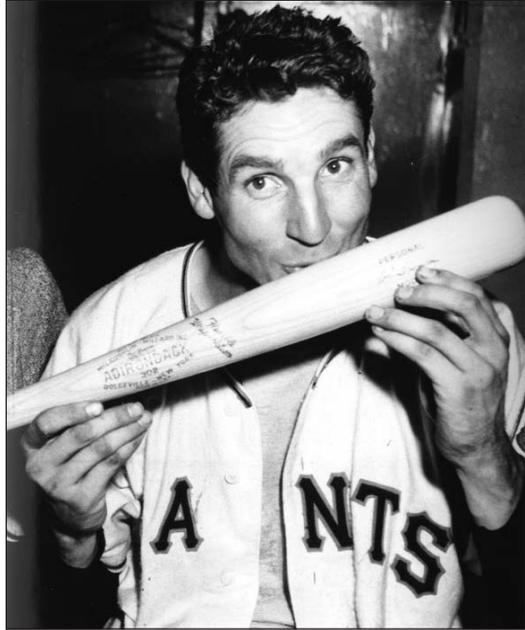
As the 1800s became the 1900s, Staten Island was nationally considered a hot-bed of baseball activity. An account in the June 9, 1906 *Minneapolis Times*, which described a game between Minneapolis and Louisville that featured a prominent minor leaguer shortstop, Staten Island's own Larry Quinlan. A quote from the story said, "Quinlan is a native of an island where baseball players are born and where the very air seems to be saturated with the national game."

As the 1920s came to a close, Staten Island already had an organized youth baseball program up and running for boys age 11 and older. Approximately 3,700 youths played organized baseball on the sandlots of Staten Island a decade before the start of Little League baseball. Over the years Staten Island has continued the tradition of supporting youth baseball sending several teams to the Little League World Series.

Of the 21 Staten Islanders to play Major League Baseball, the first, Dude Esterbrook, made his debut on May 1, 1880 with the National League's Buffalo Bisons. On September 24, 2010, the most recent Staten Islander to join the ranks of Major League Baseball made his debut when Anthony Varvaro, a 25-year-old right handed pitcher, played for the Seattle Mariners. In addition, baseball luminaries such as John Franco, Bobby Thomson, Dusty Rhodes and Jason Marquis all have called Staten Island home.

In 1999 professional baseball returned to Staten Island when the New York Yankees relocated their class-A Oneonta NY team in the NY-Penn League. After two seasons at the College of Staten Island, the "Baby Bombers" moved to the new Richmond County Bank Ballpark, on the waterfront next to the St. George Ferry Terminal.

The first Staten Island Yankee to reach the majors was slugging outfielder Wily Mo Pena with the Cincinnati Reds in 2002. The first Staten Island Yankee to reach the majors with the Yankees was reliever Jason Anderson in 2003. In their 11-year history the Staten Island Yankees have finished first four times and second three times.



Bobby Thomson played for the New York Giants from 1946-53 and in 1957.



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