

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

Cecil Ferguson



Early in this century, George Cecil Ferguson was touted as the area's finest all-around high school athlete. Some of his off-the-field feats became legendary.

As the fullback on consecutive unbeaten Terre Haute High School football teams in 1901 and 1902 (the self-declared "undisputed Indiana state champions"), the husky blond could compress a fully-inflated pigskin with one hand.

Born Aug. 19, 1884, in Ellsworth (now North Terre Haute), Cecil was the son of local street car conductor Ellis Ferguson. Before graduating from high school, he signed a pro baseball contract with Terre Haute's 1902 Three-I League team but was released after two games. He honed his pitching skills playing in Bay City and Lansing of the Michigan State League that summer.

After starting the 1903 season with Concord (Mass.) of the New England League, Cecil signed with South Bend, Terre Haute's Central League rival. Sold to Louisville of the American Association in July 1904, he caught the attention of John McGraw, the New York Giants' legendary manager, who acquired the powerful right-hander in August, early enough for Cecil to make three late-season appearances for the 1905 world champions. Led by 33-game winner Christy Mathewson, the Giants eliminated the Philadelphia A's in five World Series games. Used primarily as a reliever, Ferguson had successive 2.58 and 2.11 earned run averages, a shutout in his sole 1906 start and led the National League in saves. In the off-seasons, he assisted the Rose Poly football and baseball coaching staffs.

Aspiring to be a starter, Cecil was a key player in the Giants' five-player trade to the Boston Doves (later called the Braves) on Dec. 3, 1907. In Boston's four-pitcher rotation in 1908, he finished with a 12-11 record and posted an impressive 2.47 ERA. But in September, he injured the rotator cuff of his pitching arm.

Ferguson's 10-0 two-hit shutout of the Giants at the Polo Grounds April 27, 1909, may have been his most spectacular career performance. Still troubled by an ailing arm, he struggled the rest of the season. Though he earned 30 starts and 19 complete games, Cecil finished with a 5-23 mark and led the National League in losses with the cellar-dwelling Doves.

Plagued by control problems, he still managed an 8-7 record in 1910. He made six appearances and three starts in 1911 before the Doves sent him to Memphis of the Southern League for rehabilitation. Posting a 9-18 mark there in 1912, he retired after two years in the Pacific Coast League at Venice. His major league career record was 31-46 with eight shutouts and a 3.34 ERA.

Married to Carolyn "Carrie" Lutz of Boonville, Ferguson raised two sons, William and Cecil Jr. After leaving baseball he studied osteopathic medicine and was joined by his brother Denzil in practice here. Cecil eventually moved to Miami, where brother Ralph resided, to specialize in treating arm ailments. Long-time Vigo County coroner Denzil Ferguson remained in Terre Haute and his son Denzil Jr. followed his career path. Leslie, another brother, owned a downtown men's clothing store and was the Vigo County recorder.

On Sept. 5, 1943, while on a fishing trip in Florida, Cecil Ferguson died of a heart attack.

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