

PLAY BALL! ... THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

Vintage baseball game put on by Pejeboscot Historical Society

BY BEN GOODRIDGE

Times Record Staff



DIRIGO VINTAGE BASEBALL CLUB takes on the Sunrise Club of Brunswick in the Vintage Baseball Game at Crimmins Field on Saturday. BEN GOODRIDGE / THE TIMES RECORD BRUNSWICK

What's old became new again Saturday at Brunswick's Crimmins Field, as the Dirigo Vintage Baseball Club bested the Sunrise Club of Brunswick, 9-7, at Pejeboscot Historical Society's second annual Vintage Baseball Game. The game featured rules, customs, uniforms and equipment identical to those used in 1860.

Both clubs play in a modern-day baseball league throughout the summer, but look forward to meeting in the fall event, where they take to the diamond the old-fashioned way.

"We did this for the first time last year, and it was really successful," said Larissa Vigue Picard, director at Pejeboscot Historical Society.

Around 70 fans attended Saturday's game.

Picard said that the idea for the Vintage Game was originally conceived to commemorate the 1860 game between Bowdoin College and the Sunrise Club of Brunswick, the first known baseball game in Midcoast Maine. Bowdoin squeaked it out 46-42, the score sky-high by today's baseball standards.



STEPHANIE RUDDOCK and Larissa Vigue Picard of the Pejeboscot Historical Society pose with a pair of vintage baseball bats from 1860. BEN GOODRIDGE / THE TIMES RECORD This was due to a different set of rules that made defense and pitching more difficult. Pitchers used the underhand method to deliver the ball to the plate, fielders didn't wear gloves and batters could hit a ball fair and not worry about it dribbling foul. To help fielders cope, balls in the outfield that bounced once could still be caught for outs. But scores like the Bowdoin/Sunrise game were still quite common.

“These guys had never swung a bat as kids,” said John Coray, team captain of the current-day Sunrise Club. “They were all middle-aged millworkers. No one really knew about baseball. They wanted to play, but didn’t have the inherent skill set.”



MEMBERS OF THE Sunrise Club of Brunswick and Dirigo Baseball Club pose for a post-game photo. BEN GOODRIDGE / THE TIMES RECORD
Over the latter half of the 19th century, fans began to call for cleaner, lower scoring games, so the rules were changed and modern baseball was born. But, Coray points out, it’s fun to take a look back at how things used to be.

“You can see how the game has evolved,” Coray said. “You can see why the rules left us. But it’s really cool to see them brought back.”

Most of the players on the Dirigo and Sunrise Club teams are 45 or older, and have been playing baseball their whole lives. Coray said they all “love the sport,” and it was evident on Saturday, as the men hooted and hollered during every play and cheered each other on during big hits and important outs. Bobbled balls were common, as the no-glove rule made outs tough to come by.

“We struggle with the old rules, but it’s a lot of fun,” Coray said.

The bat used in the game was a replica of an original 1860 bat that the Pejeboscot Historical Society has in the museum. It’s one of the oldest bats on record, and was on display at Saturday’s game in a glass case.

“This is just a really fun family event and great fundraiser for the historical society,” said Picard. “It’s a fun way to celebrate local history.”

To learn more about the rules and customs of 1860s baseball, visit dirigobaseball.org.

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