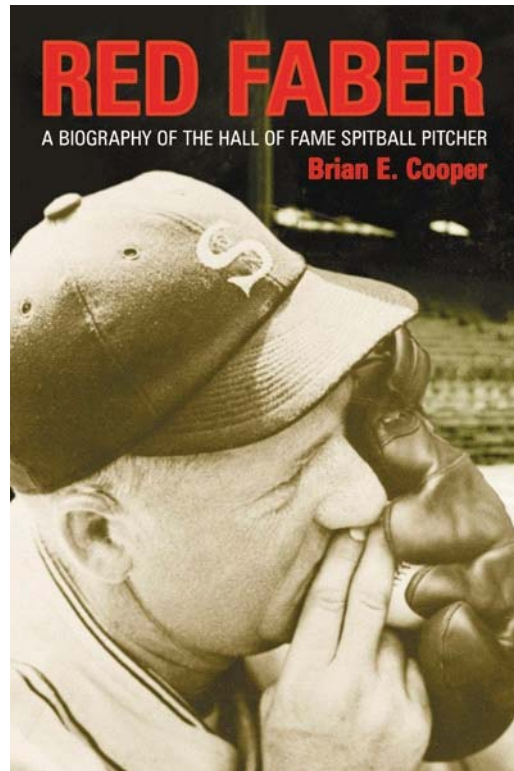


URBAN CLARENCE “RED” FABER RIGHT-HANDED PITCHER 1914-33



By Brian Cooper

Cooper is the author of “Red Faber: A Biography of the Hall of Fame Spitball Pitcher,” published by McFarland & Co. in 2007. He is executive editor of the Telegraph Herald, a daily newspaper published in Dubuque, Iowa. The following article discusses Faber’s minor league career in Iowa.

Before starting a major-league career that would earn him a place in the National Baseball Hall of Fame Urban Clarence "Red" Faber (Chicago AL, 1914-33) pitched four of his five minor-league seasons in his native Iowa.

Faber was born to parents of Luxembourg descent on Sept. 6, 1888, on a farm outside the small northeast Iowa town of Cascade, in Dubuque County. Within a few years, the family lived in downtown Cascade, where his parents, Nicholas and Margaret, owned and operated the Hotel Faber.

The earliest record of Urban Faber playing baseball is 1903, when the 14-year-old appears in the team photo of Sacred Heart Academy (Prairie du Chien, Wis.). After two years at Sacred Heart, the red-haired Faber transferred to the prep academy of St. Joseph's College (now Loras College) in Dubuque, about 20 miles east of Cascade. About that time, the Faber family moved from Cascade to Dubuque, where they lived off Nicholas' investments and real estate holdings. Urban played baseball at least one season (1906) at St. Joseph's. He also pitched for the Tigers, a leading semi-pro team in Dubuque, and other squads at a rate of \$2 to \$5 a game.

Faber's breakthrough season was 1909. Pitching for his alma mater's college varsity—though the college has no record of his actually attending college classes—the big right-hander struck out 22 St. Ambrose College batters in a three-hit victory. As Faber-led St. Joseph's cruised through an

undefeated season, Faber gained the attention of Clarence “Pants” Rowland, who was between stints as manager of Dubuque’s Three-I League entry. Rowland, who would later manage Faber and the Chicago White Sox to the 1917 World Series title, encouraged Faber to sign with the Dubuque minor league team, then called the Miners.

His first Three-I appearance occurred July 27, 1909, against Springfield in the nightcap of a doubleheader in Dubuque. Faber found himself in a jam from the start. Two fielding miscues by teammates and a sacrifice bunt put Springfield runners on second and third with only one out. Faber proceeded to strike out the cleanup and No. 5 batters, and the 20-year-old cruised the rest of the way for a 12-1 victory. The Dubuque Miners were a weak team in 1909, and local boosters worried that they would not meet the league’s attendance requirements to keep the franchise. The Miners finished sixth of eight in the Three-I (64-71), but the addition of Faber, the hometown boy, and a change in managers boosted interest and attendance. Faber’s modest 7-6 record in 1909 obscured a sparkling 1.60 ERA. He edged above .500 in the season finale against Davenport. The game lasted only eight innings, a newspaper stated, “because the score board boy got his dates mixed and posted up an inning ahead of the game.” During and after his first

professional season, Faber occasionally pitched in semi-pro games; that October, he led his Tigers to the Dubuque city championship.

In 1910, the Miners finished sixth again (60-79), but Faber made Three-I League history on Aug. 18, when he threw a perfect game at Davenport. Only seven of his 27 outs were on strikeouts, but he allowed only one ball to be hit out of the infield. (Among the Davenport Prodigals baffled by Faber that day were third baseman Ray Chapman, who 10 years later would become the only major leaguer to die from being hit by a pitch.)

Immediately after Faber's perfect game, the Pittsburgh Pirates signed him for 1911. With weak hitters and suspect fielders behind him, Faber went 18-19 for Dubuque. However, his 200 strikeouts in 242 innings and ERA of 2.03 established Faber as a legitimate major league prospect.

Faber started 1911 with Pittsburgh but never appeared in a regular-season game. He rode the bench until mid-May, when the Pirates sent him to Minneapolis (American Association). Soon after joining the Millers, however, Faber injured his arm; his participation in a distance-throwing contest might have been the cause. It was during his brief stay in Minneapolis that Faber learned the finer points of the spitball, the pitch that would become his ticket to the Hall of Fame. After a few weeks of rest,

Faber was shipped to Pueblo (Western League), where the owner and manager was Frank Isbell, a former Chicago White Sox player.

Meanwhile, late in the 1911 campaign, Des Moines was on the brink of losing its Western League entry due to money problems. Chicago White Sox owner Charles A. Comiskey saved the franchise by purchasing it. Isbell, who had sold his Pueblo team, came to Des Moines to become president, manager and, with Tom Fairweather, part-owner. Isbell made a deal to bring Faber with him to Des Moines. The Iowa native went 21-14, posted an earned-run average of 2.08 and was hailed for placing Des Moines in the first division by winning both games of a late-season doubleheader.

Faber was a popular, hard-working and hard-luck pitcher his two seasons in Des Moines. He suffered through game after game with losses or no-decisions because his teammates failed him. For example, early in 1913, with two out in the bottom of the ninth at Omaha, Faber's left fielder misjudged an easy fly ball, and the tying and winning runs crossed the plate. Such miscues seemed to cost Faber victories through most of his professional career. However, the 6-foot-tall, 190-pounder was a workhorse who refused to back down.

Illustrative was his performance the afternoon and evening of Saturday, June 28, 1913, when Faber faced league-leading Denver. The Midwest was

wrapped in a killer heat wave. The temperature peaked at 94 and remained 90 at 7 p.m., as the game churned on. The game was 2-2 after four innings. Faber and King, Denver's starter, then took turns shutting down their opponents for more than a dozen innings. As the evening's twilight gave way to darkness, Sportswriter R.E. Bales, covering the epic for The Des Moines Register and Leader, wrote that it was so "gloomy that the ball looked like a mere speck and the outfielders were almost lost in the shadows." The game should have been called after 16 innings, Bales wrote, but umpire Colliflower continued it, as "both managers and the crowd were anxious to fight it out to a decision." Umpire Colliflower finally declared the battle a draw four hours and 10 minutes after the first pitch. Faber pitched all 18 innings, striking out 14, walking seven and uncorking one wild pitch. At the plate, the usually light-hitting Faber went 3-for-6, including a double. For his efforts, he received a no-decision. However, his gritty performance only solidified his standing as a fan favorite.

Earlier that season, Faber proved that he could not be intimidated, even when his control was suspect. Leading Sioux City in the seventh inning, Faber found himself in a jam. After a walk and a teammate's error, Faber loaded the bases by delivering a pitch to the head of one Mr. Rapp. A Des Moines sportswriter described what happened to Faber after that: "The

Packers charged on him like a pack of snarling wolves, trying to get his nerve by accusing him of beaming Rapp purposely. Red helped revive his victim and then struck out Young on three pitched balls and forced Smith to lay down an easy roller for Reilly.” Faber went on to pitch a one-hitter and post a 9-0 victory.

Many days, however, Faber was less fortunate: Several times he was stuck with the loss despite outstanding pitching. “Red Faber essayed the role of ‘Iron Man’ yesterday, pitching his second game in as many consecutive days,” the Register and Leader reported. “That the lion hearted hurler failed to deliver was due entirely to the shortcomings of his teammates, who not only failed to hit behind him, but accorded him bum support.” A hometown sportswriter labeled Faber “easily the champion hard luck pitcher of the league.” He continued, “Scarcely a game that he has worked this season but has been turned out in workmanlike fashion. Something always happens, though. The team either fails to hit or had a bad day in the field. In the last four games he has pitched his mates have made just two runs behind him.”

In 1913, Faber’s record in Des Moines was 21-20 in 49 games with a 2.48 earned-run average. When the Western League announced its all-star team, Faber was among its six pitchers. In late August, Chicago White Sox

owner Comiskey signed Faber for the 1914 campaign; various reports placed the purchase price at \$3,500 to \$4,000.

Des Moines fans were happy for Faber but sorry to see him leave. A Des Moines Register and Leader sportswriter put it this way: “Red has been one of the most popular players who ever wore a Des Moines uniform. He is one pitcher who went through one of the most disastrous losing streaks possible without hearing a word that was otherwise than friendly from either the grandstand or bleachers. Not one once in his two years service here has Red heard the cry ‘Take him out!’ when he was on the mound. Game to the core, he fought every minute with every ounce of energy that he could give. The fans realized and appreciated it. That he is a wonderful pitcher goes without question. Red will have a lot of competition in making the White Sox staff, which is already filled up with high class pitching talent. If given a fair chance, he will make good, because he has every requisite for a successful major league career.”

Faber fulfilled that potential.

In 1917, he won three World Series games for the White Sox. Faber opened the 1918 season 4-1 (1.23 ERA), but spent most of the year in the U.S. Navy for the balance of World War I. In 1919, he returned to the White Sox ill from his Navy service, and injuries dogged him. He went 11-9, and

his ERA ballooned to 3.83. From the bench, Faber watched the corrupted 1919 “Black Sox” World Series, won by Cincinnati. In 1920, baseball outlawed the spitball and trick pitches, but Faber was “grandfathered” and allowed to continue to throw the spitter. That season, the White Sox were again contending for the American League pennant, Faber was back in form (23-13). However, details of the Black Sox scandal broke in the closing days of the season. With the loss of several stars, including Joe Jackson, the White Sox would never contend for a title for the balance of Faber’s career.

Despite pitching for a demoralized and decimated franchise, Faber went 25-15 in 1921; his victory total represented 40 percent of all White Sox wins that year. The spitballer went 21-17 in 1922, when the Sox posted a 77-77 record. Over a three-season period (1920-22), his 69 victories were second only to another Urban – Urban Shocker, who had 71. Though Faber was less dominating after 1922, the Iowa native stayed with the White Sox through the 1933 season, when he was 45 years old and the oldest player in the league.

Despite playing for weak teams most of his career, Faber had a 254-213 lifetime record over 20 seasons. If not for a salary dispute with Comiskey, who offered Faber a one-third pay cut to \$5,000, he would have suited up in 1934 for a 21st season. He retired instead.

After baseball, Faber dabbled in several occupations, including automobile salesman, real estate salesman and owner-operator of a bowling alley in Grayslake, north of Chicago. In 1945, he joined former teammate Ted Lyons' staff as White Sox pitching coach, a position he held three seasons. As the 1947 season opened, Faber, a 58-year-old widower, married 30-year-old Frances Knudtzon, and they became first-time parents in 1948—shortly before the White Sox fired Lyons and his coaches. The Fabers were not wealthy—his salary never exceeded \$10,000 a season, so Faber continued to work. He joined the Cook County (Ill.) Highway Department in 1954 as an inspector rodman and continued to work until retirement in 1967, when he was nearly 80 years old.

In 1964, Faber was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Urban “Red” Faber died Sept. 25, 1976, at age 88.

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