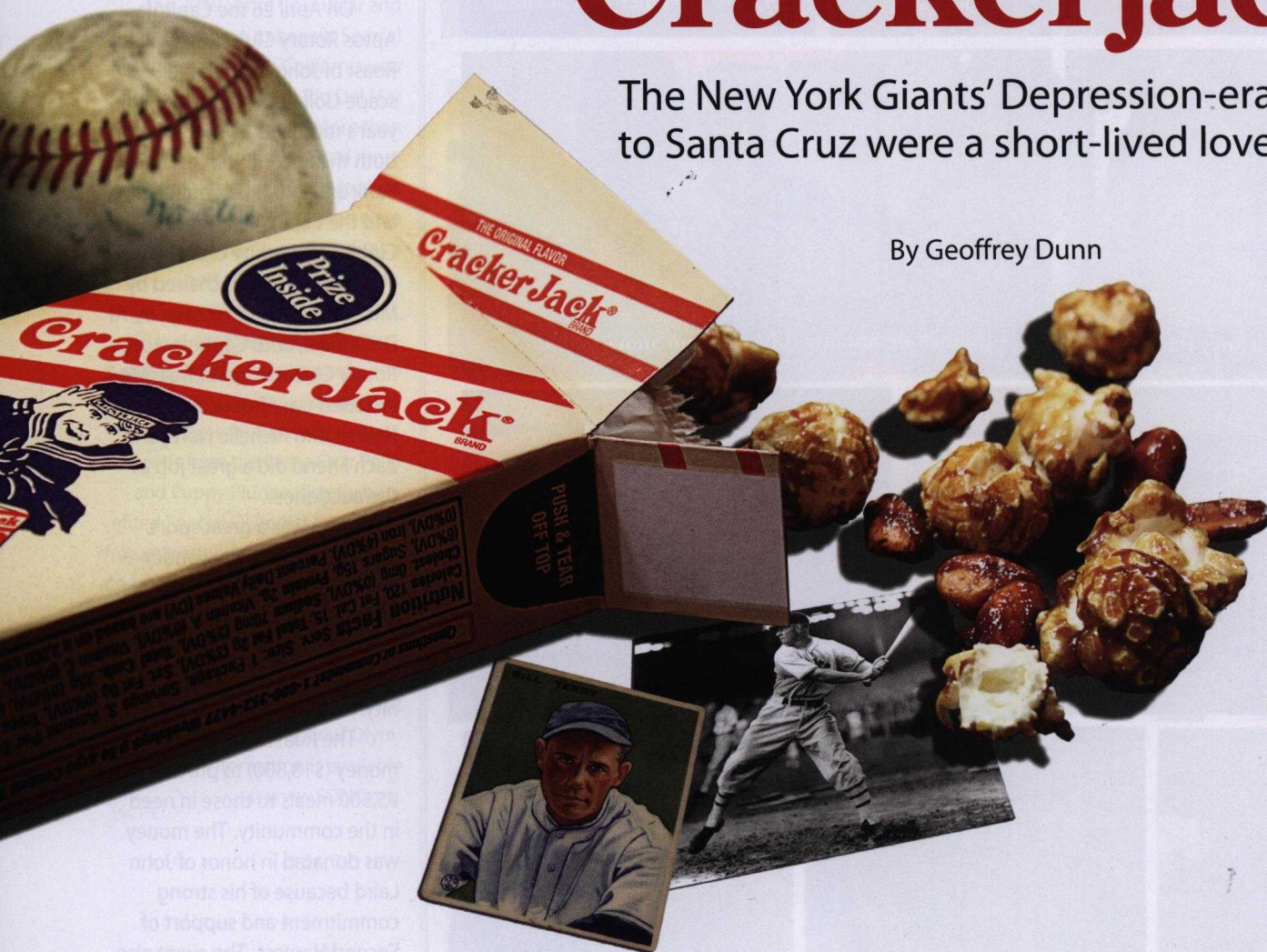


Peanuts & Crackerjack

The New York Giants' Depression-era visits to Santa Cruz were a short-lived love affair

By Geoffrey Dunn



Few locals would identify Santa Cruz as a town that hosted Big League baseball. Professional surfing events? Certainly. Major League baseball? No way.

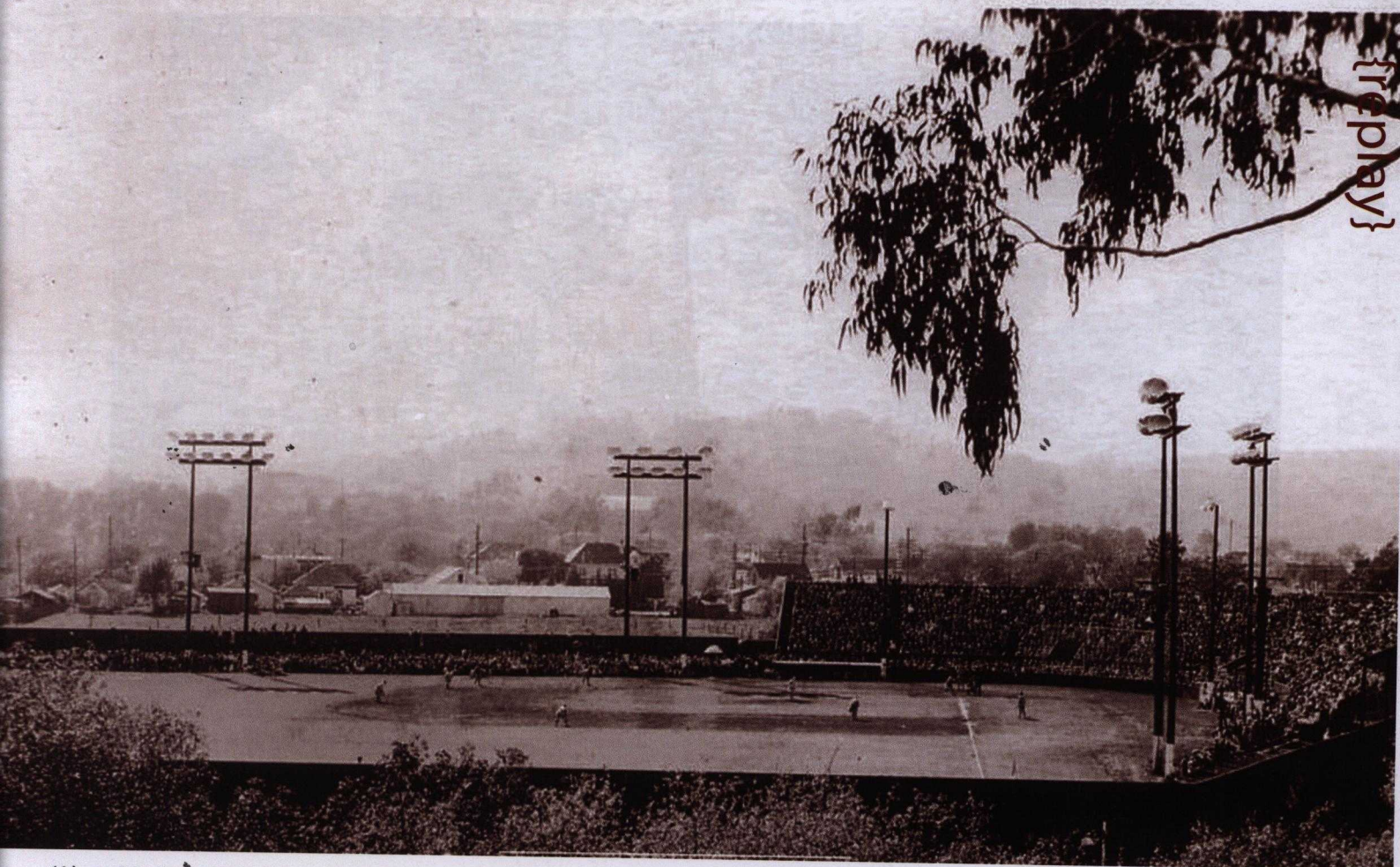
But in fact, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Santa Cruz recorded a long history of hosting professional baseball teams—from the Santa Cruz Dolphins and Beachcombers in the 1880s and 1890s, to the Santa Cruz Padres in the 1920s and 1930s. Santa Cruz was always a baseball crazy town. And this ongoing love affair with the National Pastime both shaped and reflected the community's identity for the better part of a century.

But, still, a big league team in Santa Cruz? Yes, indeed, in 1932 and '33, the celebrated New York Giants baseball team—the World Series Champions of 1933!—came to Santa Cruz to play trio of games at what was then known as Community Athletic Park—a baseball facility located at what is now the medical center at 550 Water Street, nestled against Branciforte Creek near the terminus of Market Street.

Built in 1932 for the grand sum of \$35,000, Community Athletic Park seated up to 2,500 spectators and featured innovative flood lights for night baseball, reputedly

making the field "as light as day." It was widely considered to be one of the nicest baseball stadiums west of the Mississippi. The park served as home to the Santa Cruz Padres playing in the California State League, but, even more significantly, Santa Cruz served as the spring training home of the Seattle Indians of the famed Pacific Coast League—one step away from Major League ball.

The Indians came to town under a host of fanfare and publicity, with Community Park and Santa Cruz's mild winter and springtime weather serving as lures. The park was officially opened on March 5, 1932, in a game



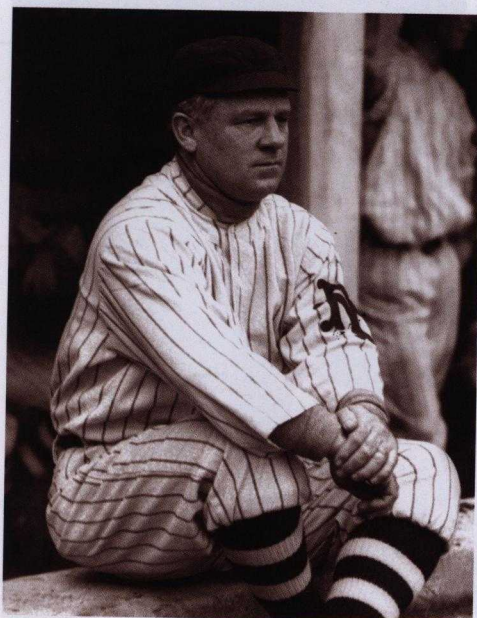
(Above) Built in 1932, Santa Cruz's Community Athletic Park seated up to 2,500 spectators and featured innovative flood lights for night baseball games which were rare at the time. After the California State League dissolved in 1936 and the Santa Cruz Padres, folded the park was dismantled.

putting Seattle against the popular Oakland Oaks, also of the Coast League.

"At 7:30 a fanfare of trumpets will be the signal for the entry of the players of both teams involved in tonight's contest," the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* proclaimed in anticipation, "following which various civic leaders and officials will speak briefly over the new public address system which has been installed at the park. The American Legion drum corps in shining steel helmets and blue and white uniforms will then march on to the field and go through various maneuvers, later forming a giant block 'S. C.' for the flag-raising exercises."

In January of that year it was announced that an exhibition game had been tentatively scheduled for Santa Cruz between the Indians and the legendary New York Giants, then managed by future hall of famer John McGraw and holding their spring training in Los Angeles.

In early march, William Klepper, the president of the Indians went south to meet directly with McGraw to see if a game could be scheduled with the Giants in Santa Cruz



(Above) New York Giants manager John McGraw skipped the Giants for three decades. McGraw was known for his quick temper and and loose interpretation of the rules.

before Seattle broke camp and the Giants headed east. Finally, on Wednesday, March 23, Klepper announced that the Giants would be playing in Santa Cruz less than a week away—on Tuesday, March 29.

Santa Cruz went into action mode. The local media promoted the game at every turn. A full-page ad on the day of the game appeared in the *Sentinel* proclaiming in bold print: "Welcome! New York Giants." More than a dozen local businesses paid for the ad, all of whom welcomed the Giants to the community. The ad included a detailed history of the Giants' legendary successes—including the 10 National League pennants garnered under McGraw's tenure.

Everyone assumed that all of the Giants' big stars, including six Hall of Famers—Carl Hubbell, Mel Ott, Bill Terry, Freddie Lindstrom, Travis Jackson, and Waite Hoyt—would be playing before local fans at Community Park. That was not to be. McGraw also scheduled a game for the same day in San Francisco—against the Seals—and most of his stars, including Ott,



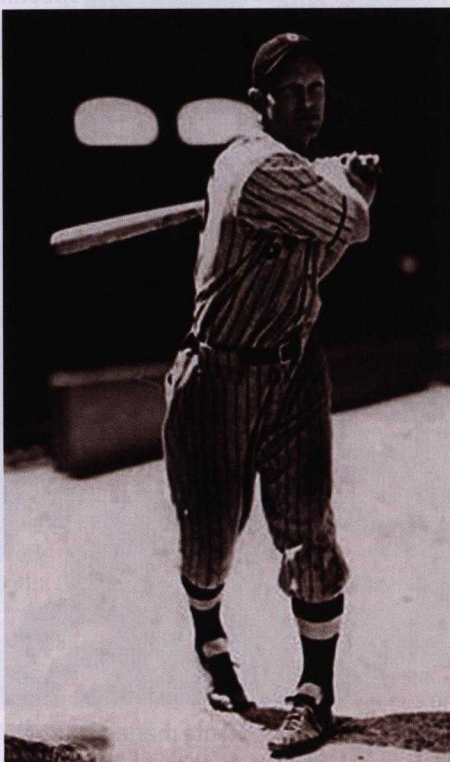
(Above) The 1932 New York Giants team photo included six Hall of Famers—Carl Hubbell, Mel Ott, Bill Terry, Freddie Lindstrom, Travis Jackson, and Waite Hoyt. Santa Cruz's fans were disappointed when none of them made the trip to Santa Cruz.

Terry, and Hubbell, went north to the City.

As a result, the mighty Giants were not mighty in Santa Cruz. The Indians crushed the team composed of Giants rookies and minor leaguers by a humiliating score of 18-4. More than 3,500 Santa Cruzans had packed into the park hoping to see Major League talent, and what they saw was an rag-tag ensemble of bush leaguers. The Indians pounded out 24 hits against the inept Giants pitching staff. Seattle left fielder Dutch Holland went five-for-five, with a pair of home runs, two doubles and a single.

The legendary McGraw, however, did show up and said he was "tickled pink" by the reception his squad received in Santa Cruz, not to mention the quality of the stadium and the lovely weather. Ironically, only 350 fans showed up in San Francisco to see the Seals drub the real Giants, 9-4.

The Giants came again in the following year (albeit without McGraw, who had retired following the '32 season), but what was perceived as a "bait-and-switch" the previous year, with all of the Giants' star players bypassing Santa Cruz, had left a bad taste in the community's mouth. Plus there were



(Above) Seattle left fielder Dutch Holland went five-for-five, with a pair of home runs, two doubles, and a single.

accusations of price gouging.

"When the Giants insisted upon the scale of admission prices (75 cents)," Sentinel sports columnist W.E. Gould noted, "they made it impossible for Santa Cruz to furnish them with anything like a good attendance." The two games played on Saturday and Sunday, March 11 and 12, were poorly attended affairs.

That was too bad. By most accounts, the first game in the 1933 series was widely considered one of the best games of baseball ever played locally. The Indians, based on a wild seven-run inning in the third inning in which Seattle collected eight-straight safeties. The Indians' popular young centerfielder Mel Almada collected four hits (including a pair of doubles), while there was stellar defense by the Indians as well, with second baseman Freddy Muller handling a dozen tough chances without an error.

The Giants legendary star pitcher Carl Hubbell did not come to Santa Cruz, but locals got to see a version of Hubbell-lite in the form of King Carl's younger brother Merritt, who pitched the final three frames for the Giants allowing but one hit.

In the second game, held on Sunday,



(Above) Seattle Indians, Mel Almada and Lou Almada flank Alice Brougham, daughter of legendary sports writer, Royal Brougham of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. After a successful career with several major-league teams, Mel Almada returned to his native Mexico where he managed and was inducted to Mexican Baseball Hall of Fame.

the Giants drubbed the Seattle team 12-3, in a rain-shortened contest of six innings. The most well-known figure on the field, ironically, was Rinaldo Angelo "Babe" Pinelli, the San Francisco-born ball player who later became a legendary National League umpire. The *Sentinel* noted that each raindrop falling on Pinelli's "brand new tailored uniform caused him to wince."

The game featured the debut of "promising" Giants rookie infielder, Bernie James, who smacked out three hits in the contest, along with a fourth that was cancelled due to the rain out, but that was to be his highlight of the year, and really, one of the few of his career.

Like many a baseball "phenom," James' promise was brighter than his performance. He was shuffled off to Dallas for the remainder of the season. He briefly came up to the big league squad the following year—he batted a paltry .224—and that would be the end of his big league dreams. He finished out

his professional career by the age of 30, still playing in the low minors. So much for his promise. Baseball can be a cruel enterprise. It is largely a game of failure and broken dreams.

Santa Cruz baseball fans had their hearts broken, too. 1933 would mark the end of the Indians' spring sojourns to Santa Cruz. In the summer of 1936, the Padres folded their State League franchise in mid-season, and professional baseball at Community Park was over. The facility was torn down in March of 1938, a mere five years after it opened to great fanfare.

(Above) A page in the 1932 *Santa Cruz Sentinel* welcomed the New York ball club's historic series.

Editor's Note: Special thanks to Jim Healey for his story suggestion.

