

THE SHEALYS

Chester News July 8, 1953
Famous Baseball Family

By John Bigham

The following article was taken from the June 27 issue of The State Magazine:

Nowhere in the state is baseball a more popular pastime than in the Dutch Fork, a fabulous section to the northwest of Columbia settled by hardy people of German extraction and famed for tidy farms, succulent barbecue, staunch Lutheranism, and a fervent love for the out-of-doors. Another reason for some fame is the abundance of Shealys, a group of such large proportions that the interlocking ties of kinship are such that perforce we must say that practically everybody in the Dutch Fork is related in one way or another with the Shealy clan.

There is a particular family within this Shealy population who, although now scattered abroad, was at one time the scourge of the Dutch Fork in baseball circles, their prowess and fame of such magnitude that the record of their achievements should be chronicled and a niche made for them in a mythical South Carolina hall of fame. It is doubted that any one family in all of the state's athletic history can rival the record of these Shealys in not only producing baseball players but actually fielding a team made up of eight brothers and their father.

By 1916 this family of Shealys, fanning out from their home bastion two miles above Chapin, had wrought such destruction on the diamonds of the Dutch Fork that tradition says they challenged any family team in the United States to a contest for national honors. This challenge went unanswered. Whereupon, the Shealys made a tour of picnic grounds in the country-side playing pick-up teams of varying strength. These aggregations were humiliated one by one although many times they consisted of some of the better players in the Fork.

The only brother living in Columbia at the present time is N. E. "Sebie" Shealy. He is employed by the Southern Bell Telephone Company and makes his home at 2906 River Drive. Sebie relates that the scores of these picnic games ran to astronomical figures

and generally the play was called on account of darkness.

"Once we got in bat," says this brother, "the other side just couldn't get us out."

This fearful combine of Shealys in 1915-16 not only played havoc with pickup teams but they defeated the town team of Chapin with ease, had little trouble with Peak, and even wandered out of the Fork to Whitmire and took the measure of that town's entry. In those days a league of some sort operated in the Dutch Fork and adjacent territory. Interest was high and oldtimers recall that upwards of 4000 fans would turn out for a game at Chapin. The Shealy brothers would often disassociate themselves from family ties and play with other teams in the area, such breaking of Shealy loyalty leading at times to a situation where brother faced brother on the field of battle.

The head of this family and the manager of the team was Noah Elliott Shealy, a bearded gentleman who never shaved after reaching the age of 21 but whose age and flowing beard were no handicap as he played the outfield. Sebie recalls that his father was a man of mild temper and as a manager never allowed the boys to dispute a call of the umpire. When the opposing team started a ruckus, the Shealys would withdraw to a distance and discuss politics, fishing, the price of cotton, or something else irrelevant until the dispute was over.

The Shealy brothers in their heyday as a family team played with modern equipment except for their bats. These were made by cousin Jim Shealy at Little Mountain. These ash bats contributed no doubt to the distance the Shealy boys could get on their hits. There being no fences around their playing fields, the balls hit by the booming bats of the Shealys often traveled the proverbial country mile. The team had no distinctive family uniform although all of them wore baseball shoes. Sebie Shealy recalls that barefooted ball players in the Dutch Fork were not uncommon.

When the fabulous Shealys took to the field they presented the following line-up. The battery was Al and Boyd. The infield consisted of Milton at first base, Lonie (also known as Pete) at second, Harry at Shortstop, and Sebie at third. The outfield was roamed by father Noah, Frank and Darr. In addition to his chore as pitcher, Al was also the team's leading hitter. He later went into professional ball, playing with St. Paul in the American Association, the New York Yankees, and the Chicago Cubs. In 1928 Al possessed an 8-6 record with the Yankees. This Shealy is now living in Chester where he teaches and coaches. His son, Don, is continuing in the family tradition having had an enviable record at Chester High in baseball, football, and basketball. He is presently a student at Clemson and plans to concentrate on baseball.

The Shealy team, as a family proposition, was broken up by

World War I as four of the brothers went into the service. Following the war they became scattered to the extent that the family team became a thing of the past. None, however, lost his interest in the game and as late as the early 30's Sebie was playing with the Seaboard Railroad team in the old Columbia City League.

With the exception of Milton, who died last March, all the children are still living and this includes four daughters hitherto unmentioned in this story. Their mother, the former Sara Jane Chapman, will be 95 on next November 6. She stays at the old home place near Chapin with son Lonie, and she is right proud that she has been around long enough to see her great, great grandchildren. Sebie told me that his mother was so busy raising a family of twelve children that she seldom found time to watch the ball

games. He says with a smile that his mother kept a really fine training table and the hard playing Shealy boys never suffered for lack of muscle building food.

"We'll have a family reunion sometime this summer," he stated, "but we won't play baseball. You know age has caught up with us. But there'll be a lot of talk about it. And by the way, I am a great follower of the Columbia Reds, win or lose. They don't have to win every game; it does a team good to lose now and then.

No doubt Sebie picked up this philosophy in later years. He couldn't have learned it as a boy of 17 or 18 when playing third base for the Shealys. Playing as a family, they never lost a decision.