MEMORIAL STADIUM

The Chrisly Mathewson-Memorial Stadium has not only a new name, but a new look. Over the years, as the Bison football squad's faces have changed, so has the face of the stadium evolved.

Dedicated to the memory of Bucknellians killed in the armed services, the stadium was on schedule when it opened October 18, 1924 — against all odds. According to the program for the first game, rain fell relentlessly during construction, leaving crews only 112 work days out of seven months from groundbreaking to ribbon cutting. But the builders finished on time, and according to alumni, it was a welcome improvement.

"Before it was ready, all the games were played on Loomis Field," remembers Donald Streeter '28, whose drawing of the stadium appeared on the game's program cover. "The only bleachers were on the hillside."

The structure seated 18,000 and was the largest in Pennsylvania at the time. It was designed to be expandable if the need arose.

Winfield Nicklaus, a halfback for the team of 1924, played in that first game, which Bucknell lost to Lafayette 21-3. The sport he and many old-timers remember was a different game in a lot of ways; for one thing, the coach wasn't allowed to talk to his team during play. "There were a couple of twins, named Blaisdell, from Hawaii," Nicklaus says. "The coach used them to call all the plays in Hawaiian."

Lights were installed in the stadium near the end of the 1920s. Joe Rhubright '35 was on one of the first teams to play under them. The halfback also was a member of the Bucknell team that won the first Orange Bowl game. "We had a nice field," he says. "There were no stands up close to the field, and you had plenty of room."

Edward Dusey '47 played quarterback as a Bucknell freshman. "Football was much more wide open," he says. "We used to punt on the third down, didn't pass much, and the quarterback was mainly a blocking back."

When a fire in the spring of 1958 destroyed much of the locker room under the east stands, more spacious facilities were installed. The lights were replaced in 1961, and the original press box above the east stands was removed in 1962 in favor of a larger facility across the field. A rifle range, refreshment stands, new seats and an electric scoreboard, gift of the Class of 1947, also were added during this time.

Changes in recent years included replacing seating, restoring the concrete and brickwork and replacing the bleachers' dilapidated south end with landscaping in which planted shrubs spell out "Bucknell."

"The coach used to make us run up and down the closed end of the stadium," says Sam Havrilak '69, the quarterback and captain of the 1969 team. The closed end is the area which since has been landscaped.

This past summer, an all-weather track and a scoreboard were installed, as well as two restroom areas and a concession stand. "It's nice to see the support from the University," says last year's team captain Chris Hackley '89. "It's an incentive-builder for the players."

1924

1989

BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY
Honoring Bucknell’s Veterans

The 1924 dedication of Memorial Stadium paid tribute to the sacrifices of Bucknell’s veterans, and today, as the Christy Mathewson - Memorial Stadium, it proudly retains that symbolism. “Christy Mathewson is probably one of Bucknell’s most famous veterans,” said Bucknell President Gary A. Sojka. “This is one way we can publicly recognize and pay tribute to the sacrifices and contributions made by thousands of Bucknell veterans throughout the years.”

Indeed, Bucknellians have answered the call to seven wars during the University’s history. The institution’s beginning in 1846 coincided with the start of the Mexican War, although that war was over before the University was actually underway.

When the Civil War bugle sounded the threat of Lee’s troops advancing toward Harrisburg, Bucknell volunteers were stirred to action to a degree they had not been by more distant threats during the Mexican War and the short-lived Spanish-American War in 1898.

The Bucknell volunteer regiment is even credited with saving the capitol during General Lee’s advance into Pennsylvania in 1863. As the story goes, almost the entire body of Bucknell students marched off with three emergency companies from Lewisburg to protect the Union from Confederate invaders.

“Without any student meeting, by common consent it was felt that the time had come to go to the front,” said one of the defenders, Bucknell alumnus Owen P. Eaches 1863, in the December 1917 issue of The Bucknell Alumni Monthly.

According to historian Edwin Theiss in the Centennial History of Bucknell University, Confederate plans to cross the river at Harrisburg and burn the Capitol were undermined by the appearance of Union troops across the river. Reportedly, the only troops passing along the river at that time were the students from Lewisburg.

Unlike any war before, World War I left an indelible impression on Bucknell. When students left college to enlist, registration fell markedly, only to be offset by the establishment on campus of a branch of the Student Army Training Corps (S.A.T.C.), which essentially turned the campus into a military post for training engineering officers.

The educational process was speeded up by four terms of 12 weeks each to prepare men for active service as soon as possible. The chant of military drills filled the evening routine and social activities diminished as an atmosphere of seriousness and consequence transformed the campus.

During World War II, the University was again called upon to serve the nation through the sacrifice of its sons and daughters, the adoption of an accelerated college program, and the transformation of the campus into a boot camp for the Navy and Marines.

Under the leadership of President Arnaud Mars, Bucknell’s involvement in the war effort earned it a higher profile than ever before. Executive director of the Pennsylvania State Council of Defense, Mars established Freedom Regiments to prepare students in civil defense and channel their military fervor into something other than enlistment. In the spirit of patriotism, Mars also filled the airwaves of major radio stations along the East Coast with the broadcast “Bucknell goes to War,” telling of the many adjustments needed to change a peacetime college into a part of the war effort.

In acknowledgement of Bucknell’s contribution to the war effort, the USS Transport Ship Bucknell University was launched in 1944, two years after Bucknell had suffered its first fatality in the war, pilot Lt. Edward Miller ’38. By the end of the war, Bucknell had seen the last of some 51 of its sons.

During the Korean War, some students and faculty were called to serve abroad, but not in the same numbers as the two previous world conflicts, and the war failed to stir the same agitation and fervor on campus as previous conflicts.

In contrast, the campus during the Vietnam War was rife with conflicting sentiments about United States participation in the conflict. Reserve Officer Training Program (R.O.T.C.) enrollments swelled to their largest level since the program became voluntary in the early 1960s, but not without vocal opposition. Petitions were circulated to have R.O.T.C. removed from campus, and counter petitions formed in defense of the program.

Barbara Carl, who has worked with Bucknell R.O.T.C. for more than 20 years, remembers the 1968 commissioning ceremony for cadets in Memorial Stadium. “Students were burning draft cards outside the gates, and F.B.I. agents were there watching. When the cadets exited the stadium, the protesters tried to break up the ranks by walking through them,” she said.

After a high of 70 commissions that year, R.O.T.C. enrollments began to drop off drastically. But a new era of students bring with them new attitudes, and last year’s freshman enrollment was the highest for R.O.T.C. since the Vietnam War.

Today, as the University renames its stadium, it honors Bucknell veterans of all wars for their heroic efforts through the years. Their sacrifices and contributions to the welfare of this nation are a source of pride to the institution.

courtesy of the Bucknell University Archives

and ‘Matty’

Christy Mathewson’s fame as a pitcher is legendary, but few people realize he was a football star at Bucknell.

Now, on the occasion of a $1.2 million facelift to Bucknell’s 18,000-seat stadium, Mathewson’s name has been added to that of Memorial Stadium as a tribute to the professional accomplishments and personal characteristics which earned him the adulation of millions of fans.

Originally dedicated in 1924 as Memorial Stadium in honor of veterans of World War I, the facility will continue to commemorate those veterans, who include Mathewson among their ranks. But bearing Mathewson’s name, the Christy Mathewson-Memorial Stadium also will stand as a symbol of the university’s commitment to a balance between scholarship and sports for its student-athletes.

Mathewson epitomized the scholar-athlete model encouraged at Bucknell and emulated by generations of Bucknellians. He was a role model in professional baseball, too, credited by many with bringing respectability to the sport in an era when it was dominated by rough-and-tumble types.

“As an ‘A’ student and a superior athlete, Matty pioneered what we refer to today as the scholar-athlete model, that balance between academics and sports that makes for a well-rounded educational experience,” said Bucknell President Gary A. Sojka. “He is an ideal role model for our students.”

“Renamed for Christy Mathewson, Bucknell’s stadium not only will stand in honor of veterans, but also as a symbol of the values and standards Bucknell holds for its student-athletes. It’s an important message to our students and to all of Bucknell’s constituencies.”

Indeed many Bucknellians have followed in Matty’s steps. In Division I, Bucknell currently ranks second only to the University of Nebraska in the number of students named to the roster of Academic All-Americans. Bucknell also is a charter member of the recently formed Colonial League in football, which emphasizes academics and requires its team members to have grade point averages indistinguishable from other students.

Matty’s reputation as a scholar was partly responsible for the claim that he brought respectability to the sport of baseball. Said sports historian Michael Gershman, “When Christy Mathewson threw his first pitch for the New York Giants on July 18, 1900, the diamond was rough and the players rougher, ballplayers were considered coarse-spoken, ill-mannered, hard-drinking country boys. Matty was different. He had actually gone to college — Bucknell — where he was president of his class and belonged to two literary societies.”

A man who steadfastly refused to play ball on Sunday and never quarreled with other players or disputed decisions by umpires, Matty was idolized by fans and players alike for his personal character. He retained his clean-living ways as a player-manager for the Cincinnati Reds from 1916-1918, and after a stint in World War I, as coach for the New York Giants and later president of the Boston Braves.

Eulogies to Matty upon his death from tuberculosis in 1925 talked more about his virtues as a man — his honesty, integrity and simple living — than his prowess as an athlete. Said sportswriter Grantland Rice, “There had been many mighty pitchers. But here was a ball player with ideals, a ball player who lifted the game up in place of dragging it down.”

One of many tributes

Matty’s lifetime achievements inspired the pride and respect of generations of Bucknellians, and today’s stadium renaming augments a long-standing tradition in Matty’s honor at the university and in Lewisburg.

The Christy Mathewson Memorial Gateway erected by professional baseball organizations in 1928, three years after Mathewson’s death, stands at the main entrance to Bucknell off Route 15. And down the street, fans still lay wreaths at his gravesite in the Lewisburg cemetery off Seventh Avenue.

Those memorials will be augmented by a monument, standing inside the entrance to the stadium, that reads:

Dedicated on September 30, 1989, in memory of Christy Mathewson, student from 1898 to 1901, who went on to become a pitcher for the New York Giants. Called the greatest pitcher of his era, he was selected as one of the original members of the Baseball Hall of Fame. An outstanding scholar-athlete at Bucknell, Matty became an idol to thousands of fans not only for his athletic ability but for his integrity of character and high ideals.

Spreading the word

This weekend’s inauguration for the renaming certainly will spread the word far beyond the stadium wall. The monument to Mathewson was unveiled at a morning ceremony attended by many special guests, including National Baseball Hall of Fame Director Howard C. Talbot Jr. and Librarian Thomas R. Heitz.

Visitors to the stadium today will receive a free baseball card of Mathewson as a souvenir of the occasion. Proceeds from the sale of a poster depicting all the phases of Mathewson’s career will go toward the Christy and Jane S. Mathewson Scholarship, established at Bucknell by Mrs. Mathewson for students with financial need who demonstrate special ability in mathematics, show integrity and dependability, and participate in school activities, especially athletics.

“We wanted everyone to have some way to remember this special day,” said Sojka. “Matty’s influence as a positive role model for young people and for us all is something not to be forgotten.”
Although a lion's share of the off-field myth surrounding Mathewson is based on his reputation as a gentleman, it also owes a debt to his photographic memory. Mathewson was a master checker player, rumored even when blindfolded to be able to handle upwards of a half-dozen opponents. “Matty has been besieged by checker players ever since we came on this trip,” McGraw told a newspaper columnist covering a 1908 Giants road trip. “They come from far and near and at all hours of the day and night. If he doesn’t cut it out he’ll go to pieces as a pitcher.”

But Mathewson didn’t go to pieces, certainly not in the season of 1908. He used the near-perfect memory that had made him a checker champion to study batters like no pitcher had before him. Mathewson knew just which pitches to use and which to avoid with every player in the league. “That’s what made him a great pitcher — his wonderful attentive memory,” Chief Meyers said. “When a batter hit a hard one off him, you can be sure they never got another pitch in the same place.”

McGraw, who managed Mathewson’s entire career after the pitcher’s first season with the Giants, also attributed Matty’s success to his ability to remember hitters, but he credited equally Mathewson’s pinpoint aim. “I never had to tell Christy anything a second time,” McGraw said. “He made a science of studying hitters. Within a few years he had charted nearly every ball player in the National League. He also worked hard on his control. When a hit meant a run or the game, he was as close to being invincible as any pitcher.”

When Mathewson’s arm began to wear out, around 1915, his love for baseball kept him in the game as a manager for the Cincinnati Reds, a job he held from 1916 until he volunteered for the Army in 1918. Mathewson attained the rank of captain in the Gas and Flame Division in France. During a mishap in training, he was exposed to poison gas that damaged his lungs and ultimately caused him to contract the tubercular pneumonia that killed him. After his return to the United States, Mathewson coached the Giants for a season continued on next page

A Loomis Field hero

The memory of Christy Mathewson comes through the years from a different Bucknell, where freshmen wore blue beanie and basketball scores of 12 points to 10 weren’t uncommon. Endowment campaigns had goals of $100,000, and a hotel room for commencement weekend cost you two dollars a night.

“On a sunny September morn, in 1898, the massive portals of old Bucknell were swung inward by an energetic Freshman Class,” begins the first class history of the Bucknell Class of 1902. The class was Mathewson’s, and it was Mathewson who wrote these words, as the freshman class historian, for L’Agenda of 1900. His was the biggest freshman class Bucknell had ever seen: 75 members.

Mathewson was among the class leaders in his three years at Bucknell. As a class officer, a musician and a scholar, he established himself as one of the Class of 1902’s standouts. He sang first bass in the Glee Club and played bass horn in the university band. He was a member of the literary society Euepsia and of Phi Gamma Delta. His class elected him junior class president, and he was a member of Theta Delta Tau honorary leadership society for men. And he was a sportsman.

Christy Mathewson was among the best athletes ever to play for Bucknell. He was in the starting lineup of three sports teams: the basketball team’s center, the pitcher for the baseball nine his sophomore year, and for the football squad he was the fullback and the star of the team.

As a freshman, Mathewson scored two touchdowns, a field goal and a point-after-touchdown, a season total of 16 points, as touchdowns and field goals were both worth five points at the turn of the century. His real strength that year, though, was his punting. “Although Mathewson’s knee was in bad shape,” one local sports reporter wrote, “he easily outpunted the famous Farquhar, (the punter for the opposing team, Swarthmore.)”

The 190-pound Mathewson became a football hero as a sophomore, when his 5-point field goal defeated a surprised Lehigh University in an otherwise scoreless game. Christy’s kicking was his trademark; he worked long hours on Loomis Field, practicing his drop-kick until he became, in the words of football coaching great Walter Camp, “the greatest drop-kicker in intercollegiate competition.”

Mathewson’s greatest feat as a drop-kicker was a 48-yard boot in a game against Army, from what has been described as a near-impossible angle. The acclaim had begun more than a year before but it was this kick, during his junior year, that sealed his reputation in collegiate football.

Mathewson scored one field goal and four touchdowns his junior year, including a 65-yard run through Susquehanna’s entire team. His punts were again worth noting — one was for 65 yards.

Matty’s most successful year was his sophomore year. Seven touchdowns and six field goals gave him a total of 65 points, including the five that won the game against Lehigh and Bucknell’s only points in a 47-10 loss to the University of Pennsylvania.

Mathewson’s performance against Penn earned him a raise in a job he had not yet even begun. He had just signed a contract to pitch summer baseball for John “Phenom” Smith’s Norfolk baseball team for $80 a month, but Smith was so impressed by Mathewson’s abilities, he came to him after the game and raised the pitcher’s pay $10 on the spot.

The Gateway Residence Center now occupies the ground that was Loomis Field in Mathewson’s day.
continued from previous page

until his health forced him to retreat to Saranac Lake, N.Y., to a clinic for TB patients.

When in 1923 he returned again to baseball, it was as president of the Boston Braves. He served in this capacity until shortly before his death, Oct. 7, 1925.

Mathewson was celebrated as a baseball hero long after he retired from active play. At a fundraiser for the New York Tubercular Association, Matty was stunned to see the number of people who had come to see him.

"I thought there would be a few boys and girls here to see if I was still alive," he opened his remarks. "I didn't expect so many people, and it kind of embarrasses me. I expect if I stand here long, you will say, 'Well, as a public speaker, he was a good pitcher.'"

Tributes to the great pitcher have run the gamut from a 1926 Memorial Song in the key of G to a one-man show by a contemporary actor who plays the part of Bix Six. Mathewson was one of the first five players, along with Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner and Walter Johnson, to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Shortly after his death, professional baseball erected a memorial to Mathewson at Bucknell about a hundred yards away from the sports stadium that will bear his name, and his portrait hangs in the Zeller Lounge of the field house.

Although Mathewson was the greatest pitcher in the game, his wife, Jane, whom he met at Bucknell, said Matty didn't need the recognition to enjoy playing ball. He was a baseball player because he loved baseball.

"He would come home grinning," she said, "like a boy who had committed some impish deed, and say, 'Well, I took those Reds again today.'"
Christy Mathewson

The gentleman who revolutionized the pitcher’s mound

The second game of the 1925 World Series was delayed ten minutes in tribute to the greatest pitcher of the first quarter of this century. Christy Mathewson had died of tuberculosis the night before.

Mathewson, whose name now graces the Bucknell University stadium, was a Bucknell football hero just after the turn of the century. He was known nationwide for his drop-kicking and punting abilities, but in oft-cited irony, his only season pitching for Bucknell in 1900 produced a good but unremarkable record of seven wins and three losses.

By 1925, the man was a legend. "They have said that no player is greater than the game," New York Herald sports editor W.O. McGeehan wrote two days after Mathewson’s passing. "Yet the death of Christy Mathewson makes this World Series seem a petty, piffling thing. The minds of the oldtimers went back to 20 years ago to the day when Christy Mathewson shut out the Athletics in a Series that was all battle and melodrama."

Bucknell was the beginning of it all. Though Mathewson had been playing semi-organized baseball since the age of 14, it was as a Bucknell fullback and kicker that he first gained recognition. "Big Six," as New York sports writer Sam Crane dubbed him after a New York City fire engine, achieved All-American status — the college sports equivalent of the All-Star team — as a sophomore. After an amazing 48-yard field goal in an 1899 game against West Point, coaching great Walter Camp called Mathewson the best drop-kicker in the country.

Mathewson was for a time the president of the Bucknell Class of 1902, although his baseball career called him away from his college studies a year before he would have graduated. Until then, he had managed to pursue them both, playing baseball for $25 a month to finance his college education.

Even before the $25-a-month job with the team in Honesdale, Pa., a position he took at the age of 17, Mathewson had been earning a dollar a game for three years on a team in Factoryville, where he grew up. The highlight of his semiprofessional career was a $90-a-month spot on a team in the now-defunct New England League.

Unfortunately, he won just two of 14 games, the team folded, and Mathewson never collected most of this princely salary. Mathewson played the summer after his freshman year with a Virginia League ball club based in Norfolk. In his single season with the Norfolk team, "Matty" won 21 games and lost just two, and midway through the season made his first big break into the majors — for a total of three games. He lost all three, and the New York Giants, who had purchased his contract for $1,500, let him go.

His second big break into the majors the next summer was substantially less noteworthy. The Cincinnati Reds paid $100 to draft him midway through the 1900 season. When shortly thereafter they traded him back to the Giants, the New York team was, in the opinion of the New York press, "the rankest apology for a team in the major leagues." The Giants finished last in 1901, even though Mathewson, in his first full major-league season, won 21 games.

That was when John J. McGraw took over as manager. Between them, Mathewson and McGraw turned what was probably the worst team in the country into the national champions by the 1905 season.

Mathewson’s major-league statistics were record-setters in their day. His performance in the 1905 World Series against the Philadelphia Athletics, in which he tossed three shutouts in as many appearances, stands unmatched. He won at least 20 games in each of 13 seasons, including three straight seasons of more than 30 wins, and in 1908 he won an unprecedented 37 games. His 16 strikeouts in a single game in 1904 stood for a long time as a record, as did his 1903 season total of 267.

But when writers remember Mathewson, it usually is not in numbers. McGeehan said Mathewson did more than any other man for the game of baseball; he made it respectable. Mathewson’s reputation as a gentleman rivaled his fame as a pitcher.

“He’s a wonderful character, a lovely character — a gentleman in every way,” said his catcher with the Giants, Chief Meyers. Mathewson refused to play on Sundays in observation of his mother’s religious teachings, and he is credited with making baseball suitable fare for women spectators.

His five children’s books, written between 1910 and 1917 in the style of literature then popular with young readers, combined action-packed baseball stories with themes intended to spark the Mathewson sense of morality in the youth of the day.
Pitching in a Pinch

An inside look at the Big Leagues

By Christy Mathewson

Fred Clarke is known as one of the most wicked sliders in the National League. He jumps into the air and spreads his feet apart, showing his spikes as he comes in. The Giants were playing in Pittsburgh several years ago, before I was married, and there was a friend of mine at the ball park with whom I was particularly eager to make a hit.

The game was close, as are all contests which lend themselves readily to an anecdote, and Clarke got as far as third base in the eighth inning, with the score tied and two out. Warner, the Giant's catcher, let one get past him and I ran in to cover the plate. Clarke came digging for home and, as I turned to touch him, he slid and cut my trousers off, never touching my legs. It was small consolation to me that my stems were still whole and that the umpire had called Clarke out and that the game was yet saved. My love for my art is keen, but it stops at a certain point, and that point is where I have to send a hurry call for a barrel and the team's tailor. The players made a sort of group around me while I did my Lady Godiva act from the plate to the bench.

Three Hit Dryden, the old American League umpire, was one of the most picturesque judges that ever spun an indicator. He was the sort who would take a player at his word and fight him blow for blow. "Tim" was umpiring in Baltimore in the old days when there was a runner on first base.

"The man started to steal," says "Tim," He was telling the story only the other day in McGraw's billiard room in New York, and it is better every time he does. "As he left the bag he spiked the first baseman and that player attempted to trip him. The second baseman blocked the runner and, in sliding into the bag, the latter tried to spike 'Hugh' Jennings, who was playing shortstop and covering, while Jennings sat on him to knock the wind out. The batter hit Robinson, who was catching, on the hands with his bat so that he couldn't throw, and 'Robbie' trod on my toes with his spikes and shoved his glove into my face so that I couldn't see to give the decision. It was one of the hardest that I have ever been called upon to make."

"What did you do?" I asked him.

"I punched 'Robbie' in the ribs, called it a foul and sent the runner back," replied "Tim."

I know that Bescher can take ten feet from the bag when I am pitching and get back safely. But, I am equally sure that, if he makes his lead twelve feet and I notice it, I can probably catch him. As a good ribbon salesman constantly has in his mind's eye the answer to the question, "How far is a yard?" so I know at a glance exactly how far Bescher can lead and get back safely, when he is on first base. If I glance over and see him twelve feet away from the bag and about to start, I turn and throw and catch him flat-footed. The crowd laughs at him and says:

"Bescher asleep at the switch again!"

The real truth is that Bescher was not asleep, but trying to get that old jump which would have meant the stolen base. Again, he takes the twelve feet, and I don't perceive it. He gets started with my arm and goes into the bag ahead of the ball.

"Great base runner," comments the fickle crowd.

Bescher has only accomplished what he was trying to do before, but he has gotten away with it this time. Being a great ballplayer is the gentle art of getting away with it.

Pitching in a Pinch, first published in 1912, is 304 pages of Christy Mathewson's collected baseball anecdotes and "inside" stories of the great American game. Within its pages, coaching great John McGraw and his world champion Giants come to life as Mathewson describes their successes and shortcomings, superstitions and the plays that made them famous. These three excerpts are from Pitching in a Pinch, published by Stein and Day Publishers, used by permission of Scarborough House. Photo above of Mathewson (second from right) and his Giants courtesy of the Bucknell University Archives.
A tribute to Mathewson

By W.O. McGeehan, sports editor of the
New York Herald-Tribune
— October 9, 1925

While the captains and the kings of baseball were gathered here last night after the first game of a world series there died at Saranac the best loved of all American athletes of all time — Christy Mathewson.

Always a cheerful and a fair fighter, he lost a most unfair fight. Mathewson in his prime had sinews of steel in his right arm, he had speed, he had everything, they said, but his greatest asset was his calm courage. This held him up, cheerful and calm, to meet the end.

While Mathewson's record in baseball will stand while the game lasts, it was not his prowess as an athlete that made him the idol of American manhood, young and old. It was the character of the man, his contempt for the chicanery that creeps into professional baseball and his frank and simple honesty.

They have said that no player is greater than the game. Yet the death of Christy Mathewson makes this world series seem a petty, piffling thing. The minds of the oldtimers went back to twenty years ago to the day when Christy Mathewson shut out the Athletics in a series that was all battle and melodrama. Twenty years ago today the right arm of Mathewson was in its prime, his blue-gray eyes were alight with the flame of battle.

The younger generation at Forbes Field today had their eyes on the duel between Vic Aldridge and Stanley Coveleski. The oldtimers were looking at the field, too, but their eyes were misty and they saw through the film of the years Christy Mathewson, Big Six himself, pitching against the Athletics and shutting them out. Even the roars of the multitude could not rouse the oldtimers. They were living back in the Golden age of baseball.

In the old days it was a Polo Grounds tragedy when Matty was batted out of the box. When Matty failed the Giants failed, and everything was wrong. The bulletin, "Mathewson out of the game," always saddened the fans while Mathewson was young Christy Mathewson, with the strength still in that right arm and the vitality to come back. Toward the last this began to happen more frequently and those who loved the game for the game's sake became sadder than ever.

And now Christy Mathewson is out of the game altogether. Small wonder that the oldtimers' eyes were moist as they looked into the mists and saw only Matty making that epic sweep of his right arm.

Photo courtesy of the Bucknell University Archives

“Greater than his game...”

Remembrances of a legend by sportswriting great Grantland Rice

Published October 9, 1925, in the New York Herald-Tribune

It was just twenty years ago that we saw Christy Mathewson give the greatest exhibition of world series pitching ever known — three games and three shutouts. It was just fourteen years ago that we left the Schenley Hotel here with Matty to play golf over the nearby Schenley course. It was over this course just fourteen years ago that Matty broke 80 for the first time in his life and knew a joy that meant more to him that morning than a pitching victory. For he had known more than his share of pitching victories and this was a new thrill.

There is little to be added to the printed epitaphs that will follow his body to the grave. He was a great pitcher, a great competitor and a great soul. He was the only man I have ever known who in spirit and in inspiration was greater than his game. For he was something more than a great pitcher. He was one of those rare characters who appeal to the millions through a magnetic personality attached to clean honesty and undying loyalty to a cause.

He gripped the imagination of a country that held a hundred million people and held this grip with a firmer hold than any man of his day or time. There might be rumors and reports concerning others, but here was one man who was clean clear through.

There had been many mighty pitchers. But here was a ball player with ideals, a ball player who lifted the game up in place of dragging it down. He held public faith in dark days when others were trying to destroy this faith. And with these ideals he was not walking along easy paths. Yet his character was such that he held even the respect of those who had no ideals of any sort, but could still pay tribute to the rugged strength of one who was indifferent to any mockery or taunts.

Mathewson was above the clamor of the crowds. He appreciated the crowds' applause, but he also knew the fickleness of fame. From the day he first walked upon the field up to his passing he set his eyes upon a certain goal along the road of honesty, cleanliness, service and loyalty, and nothing could swerve him from the path. Others have been idols of a city. Here was a nation-wide idol who at no second of his career ever stepped into the mire. He walked upon clean ground from his first public appearance to the Pennsylvania grave that will hold his dust.