

NIAGARA'S VENUE RECEIVES NEW LOOK FOR 1863

GREATER N.Y. SPORTING GROUNDS WILL NO LONGER BE HITTER'S PARADISE

BUFFALO, N.Y. (Apr. 10, 1863) – The 1862 season was supposed to be Niagara B.B.C's year. They had recruited the N.B.B.O's most prominent pitcher in Grover Wright, took on the best player from independent ball in Luther Tatum, and witnessed a historic season from New York League Batsman of the Year Arvi Hämäläinen. The result: Niagara finished second in the Upstate Championship at two games behind Utica, once again failing to move on to have the chance to compete for the Tucker-Wheaton Cup.

The thing that undid what was supposed to be Niagara's dream season was its defense. Even though they had two of the five most dependable pitchers in the N.Y.L. – Bernard Schmidt & Grover Wright – the Buffalo-based team was in the bottom third of the league in both Runs Allowed at 7.1 per game and Opponents' Average at .315. This happened even though the Niagara pitchers combined to walk 71 batsmen, a dozen fewer than any other team and twenty fewer than third-least.

While it is true that Niagara has never shown much in the way of excellence in defense, there was another factor in the team's failure to reach the summit of the Upstate Championship, one that both giveth & taketh: The Greater New York Sporting Grounds, which featured the smallest playing surface in the N.B.B.O.

From the inaugural season to the end of last year, Niagara's home park had the shortest left field & right field fences in the N.B.B.O, at 279' & 258' respectively. With neither side having a tall fence to make up for the short distance from home it meant that Niagara perennially led the N.Y.L. in Home Runs, and the fear of giving a batter a ball that could easily be belted over either fence intimidated pitchers into pitching differently than they normally would. This caused Niagara to annually be among the N.Y.L. leaders in Walks as well, and in 1862 they led the league with 143. All placed together, Niagara has been among the N.B.B.O. kings in offensive output every year of its existence – they have scored 500+ runs over 70 games every year – and in 1862 they led all 48 teams with 597 Runs (8.5 per game).

However, the same quirks of the Greater N.Y. Grounds that have benefitted Niagara batsmen so much have harmed their defensive efforts in a similar fashion. In five of the N.B.B.O's six seasons Niagara pitchers have collectively allowed 500+

runs over the 70-game season, with 1860 being the only one in which they allowed fewer than seven runs per game. It was thought that Grover Wright would be the one pitcher who could find significant success pitching in the park in spite of its unique dimensions, but even he was hit hard there in his first year with Niagara. His E.R.A. shot upward from 2.46 to 4.05, his Hits Allowed rose similarly from 331 to 394 in fewer innings, and his W.H.I.P. increased from 1.12 to 1.49. That all occurred even though his Walk & Strikeout totals were in line with career averages. All signs pointed to the park having a significant influence on the outcomes of his pitching.

The Greater New York Sporting Grounds is just that, a community sporting complex & park. A venue for the sport of base ball was not originally part of its plan, but as the sport gained popularity room was made for a field so informal clubs in Buffalo could play there. After the continued frustration of last season, club President Thomas Spencer decided that it was time to reimagine the grounds with the rapidly increasing popularity of organized base ball in mind. He was given permission to reconfigure the field, and starting this season the playing surface will look quite different:

	OLD	NEW	DIFF.		OLD	NEW	DIFF.
LFL	279 (17')	321 (10')	+42 (-7')	CAP.	8,113	8,113	NONE
LF	360 (17')	395 (10')	+35 (-7')	AVG L	1.165	1.049	-0.116
LCF	447 (9')	430 (10')	-17 (+1')	AVG R	1.133	0.994	-0.139
CF	485 (9')	450 (10')	-35 (+1')	DOUB's	1.013	1.317	0.304
RCF	440 (9')	411 (10')	-29 (+1')	TRIP's	1.094	1.201	0.107
RF	339 (11')	379 (49')	+40 (+38')	HR's L	1.010	0.641	-0.369
RFL	258 (11')	297 (49')	+39 (+38')	HR's R	0.819	0.594	-0.225

While the deepest parts of the park have been made shorter, center field and the surrounding areas will not be the shortest in the N.Y.L, and if anything that means there will be fewer Inside-the-Park Home Runs hit. Left & right field have been drastically lengthened, with the end of right field now butting up against Buffalo's Woodlawn Avenue. With that in mind, a large fifty-foot fence has been erected along the right field border, which will make doubles the new target of choice.

The changes to the Greater New York Sporting Grounds mean that Buffalo is no longer home to the average N.B.B.O. batsman's best friend, with President Spencer hoping that the alterations will make Niagara's home field more of a neutral venue for batter & pitcher alike. Mutual B.B.C's Union Armory Grounds now has the shortest left & right field at 285' each, and it should also become the most hit-friendly park. New York base ball fans wanting to see Home Runs will now likely have their best chance to do so at Mount Morris Square in Harlem.

Will the reconfiguration of the Greater New York Sporting Grounds result in Niagara B.B.C. – one of the two big clubs in Upper New York – moving on to post-season play for the first time? That is the hope of the front office. The Niagara batsmen might not like the field's new look, but it is all for the greater good.