

INTERVIEW WITH STANLEY COVELESKI

I pitched five exhibition, amateur ball games in my life, that's all I ever pitched, five games, and then I went into professional ball. Iⁱⁿ the fall of the year, 1908. Fellows just picked me up and asked me to play. See, I worked in the mines, coal mines, when I was 12 years old. I worked from 7 in the morning to 7 at night, for \$3.75 a week! I had a habit of throwing stones, see. After working, see, I'd put a can on a log, or tie it to a tree and throw and throw and throw at it. After hours. Well, the amateur ballclub there saw what I could do, saw me throwing and asked me if i'd pitch for them. I said yes. So I went out, pitched five ball~~s~~ games, won the five and got into Lancaster in the Tri State League.

I had a curve ball, a slow ball and a good fast ball, at that time. I had good years in the Tri State League. Won ~~xxx~~ twenty some games in my first ~~game~~ year up. But, see, you had somany good ballplayers at that time. They'd take them right off fthe sandlots and let them go.

So then, when I went to the Coast, I saw them throwing the spitball and I said to myself, by gosh I'm going to try to throw that. I started

working on that spit ball and I could make it do practically anything I wanted it to do. Did n't thow one in my life till I got out to Portland. Became one of my best pitches, cause I could make it do anything I wanted it to. Never hit a man in my life, I don't believe. If a spitball is dangerous, then a knuckle ball is dangerous, cause a spitball is nothing but a knuckle ball. Does the same thing, acts the same way. I could throw my spit ball asa fast ball and the knuckle ball as the slow ball. Just ~~wet~~ wet them two fingers. Then I'd hold it back with my thumb and slip it over. Make it go in there and it wouldn't be turning. Did the same thing with the knuckle ball, though I didn't use it. Knuckle ball doesn't spin either.

A good knuckle ball, you can't catch, no matter what glove you have. You know, a good one. That ball will come in a-waving, like that. I've seen balls that well, I've seen catchers couldn't tatch more than two in as many innings. Sam Rice, he was the first to get up in a game I reemmben, he got a triple off me. Got the next three out. Second inning the first fellow gets a double off me, and I strike the next two out. But that catcher. I don't think he got more than two balls the whole two innings. I hit him all over his chest and all. Same thing as a knuckle ball, that spit ball. I knowed which way it would go, but some gatchers....I could

break it down, or down and out... I could do that ~~xxxx~~ three and two, or anytime. I had as good control over the spitball as I had on my fast ball. I could break it down, down and out or ~~down and out~~ up. Down, or out, or down and out. And I knew which was the ball's going. Just the wrist action, that's what makes the difference. I threw mostly overhand, some sidearm though, too.

Steve O'Neill caught me for about 9 years in Cleveland. He's the only one that really caught me. He didn't even have to give me a sign, he knew what I was throwing. He caught ^(sic) me so long, he knew everything.

Well, you know, at that time there were a lot of pitchers who couldn't even control a fast ball. And that same wild fellow will try a spitball. And he'd throw...I've seen them throw five or six feet ~~about~~ above where the batter was hitting. But, you take Shoker, Favor, Walsh, me, Quinn, I don't believe any of us fellows ever hit a batter with a spitball. We had control of it. You take these fellows who never even had control of a fast ball or a curve, and they be trying to throw a spitball... why you see it 5 or 6 feet above their heads! Everybody thought it was bad because of that, but it's a good ball. I like the spitball. Pretty near the same speed a fast ball has. Why I could...as fast as I threw my fast ball, that's as fast as I could throw my spitball...just as fast. ✓

Knuckle balls, you see, you're really pushing them out, they're much slower. Slow ball. No, good spitballs weren't dangerous. Pitchers made them so, cause they couldn't control themk , that's the trouble. Couldn't even control a fast ball or a curve gall. We only used alum on that ball. Had it in my mouthd and all you had to do was wet them two fingers. Sometimes, if it was good and hot, then it would pucker your mouth some, get gummy.

Same thing as a shine ball. All they done was put parafin in the seams. The way you held it, that's the way it would go. Make it sail. Cicotte's shine ball...that was just parafin and a little dirt. That's all. Legal at the time he started, but he kept ~~xx~~ at it and kept at it and soon he had to quit doing it. Course they seem to be really covered with parafin, cause the dust and all would really get in there, see. When you go to hit that, why you just push it one way or another, see.

Went to the mouth every pitch. I wouldn't maybe throw all spitballs. I'd go maybe two or three innings without throwing a spitter, but I'd always have them looking for it! Always had the glove over the hand, when I went to the mouth. Yep, the batter had to look for six different pitches, not three. We had fast balls, curve balls, slow balls, spit balls, shine balls, emory balls. And if they started getting a foothold, we could

throw close to them and get them out of there.

I threw an emory ball every once in a while. Mainly spitball, fast ball and curve ball. I'd slow up on a lot of balls too, not all of them were fast, slow up on some of them.

Had five brothers ballplayers. My oldest brother, killed during the war, they say he could throw ~~xxxxxx~~ a ball as fast as you could hit one. He was a pitcher. Now, Fred, he was next, he got rheumatism. He was going to the outlaw league in Phila., but the rheumatism put him out. Well, now John, he was trying out for third base but Eddie Collins beat him out of a job. Went to St. Louis, and from there was shoved back. Then there's me and Harry. Five of us. I'm the youngest.

Now here's that story about Harry and McGraw and the National League. McGraw, all he needed to win three ball games. They played Phila. the last week of the season. Phila hadn't beat McGraw in a ball game all that year. 1909. Fall of 1908. He picked Harry up from Lancaster in 1908 and he goes in there and beats them three ball games that fall, and knocked them out of the finish. All he had to do was beat them one. Here's a ball club that hadn't beat them all year! McGraw didn't get him out of the league. Course I think what did get Harry out, a ball come up and bounced and hit him between the legs. I think that did it.

✓

Naw, I heard that story about McGraw kicking Harry out of the league. There's just nothing to that story. Lot of bull. Something about playing a harmonica and get Harry as the goat or something. But Harry never played one in his life. Never played ~~nothing~~ in his life. No, McGraw just couldn't get over that beating. Never did get over it. All he ~~ix~~ had to do was win one game, and here's a ball club hadn't beat him once all years, and here's Harry, a rookie, and beats them three games in one week!

Harry was a good pitcher. 1914 or '15 he won twenty some ball games, with Detroit. That year Detroit won 105 ball games. But Boston won 110! '14 or '15. My best years were 1914 to about '24.

Went up with the A's in 1912, played three ball games, but couldn't hold me job. Well, they had Planck, Bender and Coombs there . Don't know who could have beat them three pitchers out. Connie Mack was sorry afterwards, I know that. I was only with th A's that year for the fall of the year. C nnie was a good manager. He never...if you'd done something wrong, he'd never bawl you out on the bench, or at the hotel. He'd talk with you on a walk, ask you to take a walk with him, or something. And he neverlet anybody else but him bawl anybody out.

✓

Now, Speaker, well, they're all good managers, if you give them the material. Manager's important all right. Why I came to ask for help many times. Good manager can make good pitchers, you know. Can get somebody up there to pitch, why he has a chance of winning the pennant. He sees ~~what~~ which pitchers have which balls and just makes them do that one thing and so he's able to make good pitchers. Now If I'm going out to bat and there's a man on base, now I know what I'm going to have to do. He don't have to come in and tell me what to do. I know what I've got to do. And everybody on the ballclub should know, what to do when there is a man on first. You move him down there. And everybody should know how to bunt. Even I knew how to bunt, and I was no hitter. Don't hardly try to bunt any more.

Now, if you'd take the old times, and put them up there today, and where they only had to hit a fast ball or a curve ball, like they do today, why I believe they'd be better hitters than the players today. Why you take these fellows today, you stand them up against 5 different kinds of pitches and curves, why you're not going to take no foothold! Oh, no. Nowadays, they all ~~take~~ take footholds on everybody.

Tell me, why are they making the ball plarks ~~shorter~~ shorter? Why we had a dead ball and long fences, and we were still hitting a homer!

✓

Why I've even seen Babe Ruth bunt, when it came to a certain time, you know. I seen him bunt many a time. We was in there for our heads. I think we were better hitters.

Course you got good pitching today. Now, take Walter Johnson. He didn't have nothing but a fast ball. Had no curve ball, no slow ball, no knuckle ball, no spitball. Nothing but a fast ball. You stood there at that plate, and here's that ball coming over the plate, and still you couldn't beat him. Now, if you give that fellow a curve ball and a change of pace, I don't think anybody'd ever beat him! I think he was the best pitcher I ever saw. Coombs, Plank, Bender, all good pitchers, all young boys. We had a lot of good pitching then. Ruth was a good pitcher. I pitched against him, both when He was a pitcher and at the bat.

Now, I remember, I'm pitching a game in Boston against him and it run about 12 innings, and its nothing, nothing, I think and I know I was throwing spitballs, cause that's practially all I ever throwed. And he hit that sunofagun rith smack over there, that right field fence. And about a week after that he quit pitching and went to hitting! That's the truth.

✓

Cobb was a hard customer to pitch to. He was fast, see. He could bunt, he could place his hits, you know. He's always placing his hits. He'd bunt and he'd see you there and he'd just get in there. No, Cobb never hit many home runs. More of a pusher, you know. But he was fast.

Sam Rice really gave me trouble. He was the toughest gun I was ever up against. He'd hit everything. He give me more trouble than anyone. Nice fellow, too, Sam.

Last game of the world series, was just like another old ball game to us. Pitched that game and won it, and walked back alone to the clubhouse and nobody said a word except maybe, Nice Game Covey, or something like that. Wasn't nothing to us. Just another ball game. Never come in like they do now. Now they grab you and carry you off and what not. Just a ball game that's all. Course you know there's a little more money in it but that's all. 1920 that was. Won three complete games. First since Matthewson, I think. And Joe Wood did it too. One of my best friends. We use d to have a camp down there. I don't go there any more, but he stays there and hunts all the time. Lives in Parker's Glen, right in the middle of the mountain. He was a good pitcher. Wild enough just to be good. Then, when he went to play right field for us, he could throw pretty good in there. But naw, we weren't excited to be in that series.

✓

Just another series of games. We knew what we had to do. Nothing exciting. I didn't see anything exciting about it. No kidding, didn't seem to me like anything, even when we won the first game and then the second game, no kidding. I ~~g~~ figured it was my job and I done it and that's all.

Y^U know, I got to the point where I wouldn't hustle no more. See, a player~~s~~ get to be with a club too long. Gets lazy, you know. I never did like Cleveland. Don't know why. Didn't like the town. Now the people are all right, but I just didn't like the town. Course, sometimes when you don't like something it just gets in your craw and you don't like it. When you don't like it, you don't win. So I was traded to Washington in '25. Bucky Harris was the manager. Smart manager. He tried to pull a lot more different player~~s~~ than I ever saw. Tried to change the game a little, you know. He watched his fellows. I don't know he was just a different manager than all the rest, to me. Well, he was just smarter, that's all. Things come to his mind so quick. Different plays. He was a nice fellow to work for.

Then when I went to New York, I 'd go in and start them, but that's about all. After about 3 or 4 innings, my arm'd give out.

That '25 Washington team was a good hitting team, but nobody could

field. All you need is good pitching and good fielding. Bucky'd come over and he'd say, according to who's up, well, what are you going to pitch him. I'd say, I'll pitch here, inside or outside, or whatever. And by God those fielders would have two or three steps on that ball before it was hit! Why every time I'd pitch we'd have three or four double plays, and back then, that was an awful lot. Joe Judge at first base, Lou Gee, Peckinpaugh ~~XXXXXXXX~~, Bucky, Sam Rice, Heinie Manush, Goslin. Good ball club. Muddy Rule was the catcher. We had Walter Johnson, too. Walter was the best fellow in the world. You'd never hear him say one word about anybody to anybody! Walter was swell! But he was too easygoing to be a manager, like he did later. You got to be pretty tough to be a manager.

Snow and rain all the time we was in Pittsburgh. Had to take 3 or 4 days off on account of snow. That series. We should have beat them. At one point we were leading three games to one.

After 1928, I fooled around with amateur ball over here. I liked the place here, so I just coddin'd in. Had a selling station, then got in the wrong business.... I used to run a little amateur kid's team, and if I didn't give a kid a chance, well, they wouldn't come buy gas. His friends wouldn't come ~~with~~ either. Boy, I had myself a hell of a business. That's

the way things were. Hell you can't satisfy everybody when you're running a ballclub.

I had a lot of fun playing baseball. I enjoyed it. I'll tell you... you enjoy it as long as you can be up there winning...but when you're not winning, it's a tough racket! You got 4, 5, 6, or 7 fellows looking for your job all the time. You worry all the time. There's always someone waiting to get in there. And if you're trying to get in and there's somebody else starting there, why you probably will never get in there. Baseball is a worrying thing. You worry all the time, from the start to the finish!

9Naw, when I came up I didn't get no bonus, but I went from \$9 a week at the mines to \$250. That was something. Quite a jump.

I've seen Peckinpaugh make some bad errors. Like in that series. I've seen him, with little pop flies, couldn't catch them. Don;t know why. Went to pieces all at once. Was a wonderful fielder once. Wonderful ballplayer. Eight errors in the World Series! Something must have got into his mind, I guess, cause he was really great before that and after that.

It's all in your mind, you know. Baseballs' all in the mind. How are you going to keep it out of your mind. That's the first thing you

think of when you get out of bed in the morning...baseball. And you go to bed at night, and what's on your mind: baseball. That's always on your mind.

Now take ^{Al Sothern} ~~Al Bauer~~, the spitball pitcher. You know, when he was a young pitcher, if you'd just holler, hurry up, hurry up, when he was pitching, you know, he'd throw it a mile away from you. He couldn't control it. Just holler, hurry, hurry, hurry, and he'd lose his mind. Something just got to him.

it's all different today
Now, you take a hitter up there today, if he's got three and nothing, he's liable to take a swing on the next ball. Now you tell me where's the advantage in that. And he's looking for a long drive over the fence. Naw, I can't see any percentage in that.

And, what the hell, we used to have these teeny gloves with the hole in there. I never cut the hole, but all these infielders did. They'd get a new glove and right away they'd cut that center out of it.

No, I was never a strike out pitcher. Why should I throw 8 or 9 balls to get a man out, when I got away with 3 or 4? But if I had to strike him out, why I could. Now take the World Series in Cleveland. The first game I pitched 72 balls. The second I pitched 78, that's shows how close I was. And the third game I pitched 82. We didn't have much

trouble from that Bklyn team. Only 15 hits in all three games.

You know I pitched 7 and a half innings in Cleveland, once, without throwing ~~the~~ ^a ball. Every ball I threw was hit or missed, or strike out. I didn't throw one ball that missed that ~~any~~ plate, in seven and a half innings! I always had control. From the very beginning. From throwing those stones. And the plate's a lot bigger than a can to throw at. That's how I built my arm up, I guess, throwing stones at cans. Hell, I could put a can across a street and three out of five times I could knock it off the log....with stones. And that's what I done when I was a kid day after day, throwing stones. And when it come to throwing a baseball, ~~why~~ why, it was easy to pitch.

So, my first year the Athletics, Connie Mack calls me in ans days, I want you to work today. So I says, OK. Ben ames caught me. I don't know if you remember big Benny. He says, now all you have to do it throw right to me, I'll give you a mark. So I pitched and gave them three hits and shut them out three to nothing! That's how we did it. I just aimed wherever he held his glove, He knowed the men, I didn't know nothing except how to aim at his glove, that's all.