

# Eddie “Smoke” Stack

*Ray Schmidt*

**M**ost of the baseball record books that are weighing down historians’ bookshelves these days present a picture of baseball as an overwhelming torrent of numbers, percentages, and other mathematical gymnastics. While a player’s career is usually judged solely by the length and sheer volume of his statistics, what is often forgotten is that most of the men who have helped shape baseball’s storied past actually compiled rather undistinguished major league records. Many of these players also contributed greatly to the colorful history and lore of baseball through their participation in the game’s venues outside the “big show”.

One such player was pitcher Eddie Stack, notable for his jump directly into the major leagues in 1910, after just two seasons of college and semiprofessional baseball in the Chicago area. This was a period in baseball’s history when not all the talented players, especially college players, were eager to endure the hardships and low pay of the minor leagues. The resulting top-flight local baseball during the first two decades of this century represents the golden era of semipro ball in the United States, and so Stack’s accomplishment was not considered all that unusual at the time.

He was born William Edward Stack on October 24, 1887, in Chicago, to his parents Edward and Mary. His father was from Ireland, and the family had settled in what was a very tough neighborhood on the near West Side of the city. Part way through high school, in 1904, Eddie’s parents felt it best for him to begin attending

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St. Viateurs College (also a high school) in Bourbonnais, Illinois, about fifty miles south of Chicago.

By the spring of 1908, in his junior year of college, Stack had matured into a top-flight pitcher, who also played center field and second base as the Saints finished 18-1 and claimed the co-championship of the western universities. Before the college season ended, he had also begun pitching on Sundays for the top-level semipro team, the Joliet Standards. But in late June the Standards brought in a former major league pitcher named Harry “Klondike” Kane, and Stack moved over to the Chicago Marquettes.

The spring of 1909 found Stack serving as the team captain in his final year at St. Viateurs, as the Saints again claimed the western college baseball title. He had again been pitching for the Joliet Standards while the college season was still in progress, and he demonstrated his development by winning six of seven appearances, including a pair of two-hitters over top Chicago semipro outfits. In late June of 1909, Stack left Joliet and signed with former major leaguer Jimmy Callahan and his famous Logan Squares team on Chicago’s north side. On July 3 he out-dueled Rube Foster to shut out the Leland Giants, 5-0, on three hits, on the way to an overall record of 17-8 for the season. But on July 7, 1909, controversy had broken out over Stack’s services when it came to light that both the Chicago Cubs and the White Sox were claiming ownership of his major league contract.

**Contract problems**—Stack, believing himself free of his Joliet contract, had signed with president Charles

Comiskey of the White Sox for an undisclosed amount. But two days later it came to light that owner Billy Moran of the Joliet team had sold Stack's contract to president Murphy of the Cubs for \$100, on the basis of Eddie having made a verbal agreement with Manager Frank Chance of the Cubs for \$400 per month.

When the dispute went to the National Commission, Murphy provided an affidavit claiming that Stack had called on him and accepted terms for the 1910 season, while Comiskey contended that Stack had called on him prior to meeting Murphy and had accepted terms with the Sox. At first Stack insisted that he had accepted terms with the Sox prior to the Cubs, but under questioning by chairman Herrmann the pitcher finally admitted that he had in fact first accepted the terms offered by the Cubs.

His contract was then awarded to the National League club, and for his actions in the case he was fined \$50 and ruled ineligible until he refunded \$109 which he had accepted from the White Sox. *Sporting Life* noted that, "This is but one of the many cases showing the lax notions of ballplayers regarding contractual and financial obligations and illustrates...the imperative need of just such a body as the National Commission to control players, to do justice to players and magnates alike."

Stack accompanied the Cubs to spring training in 1910 as a mature pitcher with a good curve, a spitball, and a heavy fastball. But the Cubs were ready that year with another great team, and even though Frank Chance was impressed by the young pitcher, Stack was sold to the Philadelphia Phillies on May 26, 1910, without having appeared in a game for Chicago.

**The Philadelphia story**—Eddie made his major league debut against the Cubs on June 7, 1910, at Philadelphia. He made Chicago fans feel that the team made a mistake in selling him. For the first six innings he held the Cubs hitless until his future roommate, Frank Schulte, led off the seventh with a single. Eddie finished with a

masterful three-hit 1-0 win, which prompted sportswriter Ring Lardner to launch a good-natured attack on the kid from Chicago's West Side, with a game account headlined **STACK IS TRAITOR**. Stack made three more starts between June 14 and 22 and pitched complete game victories in all three, but he was inconsistent through the rest of the season, and ended with a 6-7 record in 20 appearances.



Eddie "Smoke" Stack

In 1911 Eddie was back with the Phillies and hoping for a good season, but manager Red Dooin stayed mostly with a rotation of Grover Alexander, Earl Moore, and George Chalmers until mid-August, when Stack was moved into the regular rotation. On August 19 in St Louis he beat the Cardinals, 5-2, followed within days by a 3-2 win over Pittsburgh, and then a five-hit, 3-1 win at Cincinnati.

With three complete game wins in eight days behind him, Stack squared off against the equally hot Rube Marquard of the New York Giants on September 1 in the second game of a doubleheader, with 12,000 fans looking on. For seven innings the teams remained scoreless. In the eighth Eddie gave up his only walk, to Art Fletcher, followed by a single to Chief Meyers. Misplays by the Phillie infield let in two runs and the Giants prevailed, 2-0, as Marquard finished with a one-hitter. Eddie remained in the rotation until the end of the season, finishing with a 5-5 record in thirteen appearances as the Phillies ended up in fourth place.

**On to Brooklyn**—In November twelve players from the Reds and Phillies, including Stack, made a twelve-game tour of Cuba, where over 14,000 fans turned out in Havana for the opener against the Alemendez club. It must have come as a shock to Eddie when he was traded in mid-December to

Brooklyn in exchange for pitcher William "Doc" Scanlan, who was coming off a 3-10 season. The Phillies would come to regret this trade. Doc Scanlan never appeared in another major league game.

After getting married on January 3, 1912, to Miss

Kathryn Gilson Dwyer of Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, Eddie went to spring training that year with a definite chance to be a starter for a Brooklyn club that was coming off a seventh-place finish in 1911. On April 20 he stepped into the regular rotation and stayed there for most of the summer, although he pitched inconsistently. On September 4, though, Eddie pitched the finest game of his major league career as he worked all thirteen innings and held the Boston Braves to just three hits at old Washington Park, outdueling "Hickory" Dickson for a 2-1 win. In Eddie's final 1912 start on September 27, he defeated the Phillies, 3-1, on a five-hitter in front of fewer than 150 fans at Washington Park.

The 1913 season would prove to be the best of Eddie's major league career. He got off to a good start on April 25 by scattering six hits for a 7-1 win over Boston. In May, Eddie beat the Braves two more times, including a 2-0 shutout on May 31, while starting to appear more in relief roles.

**Back home**—On June 27 Stack won his final victory for Brooklyn as he stopped the Phillies, 6-1, with a three-hitter. On August 5, 1913, he was traded back to the Chicago Cubs in an even swap for Ed Reulbach, the long-time Cub legend.

Manager Johnny Evers of the Cubs gave Stack an immediate start on August 7 against the Phillies and he responded with a complete game 5-2 win, giving up only four hits. On August 12 Evers tried to capitalize on Eddie's ability to beat the Braves, but the magic was gone as Boston shelled him for seven runs. On September 9 Stack threw his final big league shutout with a 4-0 win over St Louis. His last major league win came on September 28, 5-3 over Cincinnati. He ended the 1913 season with a composite record of 8-6 in 34 games.

In 1914 Stack was back with the Cubs, but he pitched ineffectively, as an increasing stomach problem restricted him to only seven appearances and an 0-1 record. He was released after spring training 1915.

Faced with a choice between going to the minor leagues or accepting the realities of life, Eddie wisely decided to begin preparing for a second career. He satisfied his baseball desires by returning to the fast-paced Chicago semipro competition on the weekends, worked at different jobs during the week to support his family, and began studying for a teacher's degree at Chicago Normal College.

**Back to semipro company**—In 1915 Stack began pitching for the Chicago Tigers of the City League. His opening win on May 9 merited a banner headline across the top of the entire sports page of the *Chicago Tribune*. Eddie "Smoke" Stack was still a big name in Chicago baseball, and overflow crowds jostled for space every Sunday that he was on the mound. In July

Eddie jumped to the famous Niesen's Gunthers, where he eventually finished with an overall record of 16-6, while leading them to the Litzinger Cup title.

On August 22 the Gunthers traveled the forty-five miles to Joliet to take on the strong Rivals before a large crowd. During an argument between the Gunthers and the umpire, Rivals' owner and manager James Sime began taunting Stack, and in no time flat the two were in a full-fledged brawl, which quickly included several fans who jumped from the grandstand to join in the attack on the former big league hurler. With players from both teams in the scrap, it took a fleet of Joliet police to restore order and clear the field. Such were the hazards of old-time semipro baseball.

The quality of top semipro baseball in Chicago was still at an outstanding level in 1915. Former major leaguers still played on the top teams, and current big leaguers often appeared using assumed names, to the delight of the press, which usually went along with the open secret and did not reveal the true identities of the players.

From 1905 on, the top semipro clubs of Chicago had regularly played post-season games against major league teams. In 1906 the Logan Squares had swept the National League champion Cubs and the American League champion White Sox on the same weekend. Minor league teams also came through Chicago for exhibition games, with the local semipros more often than not coming out on top. In July, 1915, the Mutuals team brought in most of a Three-I League club to play under their name against the eventual pennant-winning White Giants. To no one's surprise the White Giants crushed the Mutuals' hired guns, 13-5. Later in the season the White Giants defeated the Chicago Whales, Federal League champions of 1915, 2-1.

In 1916 Eddie spent the spring pitching for the Gunthers before jumping to the Garden City club in May, and then eventually to a team in the northern suburb of Glenview. On January 26, 1917 he received his teaching certificate and embarked upon a thirty-nine-year career as a teacher and administrator in the Chicago school system, including a twenty-year stint at the Montefiore School, which was for the more troublesome students of the city. In 1917, Eddie returned to his old club, the Logan Squares, and compiled a 17-8 record in 28 games. His 2-1 win over the Gunthers on June 3 was accomplished before over 3,000 fans at the Squares' park.

Eddie began the 1918 season with the Squares. One of his best outings came on May 26 when he lost a 2-1 decision to the Gunthers and Jeff Pfeffer of the Brooklyn Dodgers, now a navy trainee at the nearby Great Lakes base. By mid-June the Chicago League had dropped its schedule because of the war effort, and the Logan Squares began playing service teams exclusively. On June 23 approximately 5,000 fans mobbed

the Squares park to watch the Great Lakes team, with several major leaguers in the lineup, blast Stack. In mid-August Eddie went to the Cicero semipro club and pitched there for the rest of the season, eventually leading them to the McGurn Cup title.

The season of 1920 was Stack's last as an active player, and it was probably fitting that he spent the entire year as a member of the Logan Squares. He experienced a comeback of sorts, with an 8-5 record in fifteen games. Eddie ended his pitching days with two brilliant performances, as he scattered seven hits over twelve innings on October 3 in beating the Gunthers, 1-0, and then defeated the Normals, another longtime foe, on October 10 by a 4-3 score. The Normals pitcher was Jack Quinn, just off an 18-10 season for the New York Yankees, who had been brought in specifically to beat Stack and the Squares.

His playing days were now over. Eddie Stack had pitched five years of major league ball and eight years of top-flight semipro ball during the Golden Era of the game in Chicago. His lifetime major league record was 26-24 in 102 games, and his documented semipro record was 89-42 in 142 appearances.

Early in the 1920s the stomach problems he had suffered for years became so bad that Eddie went to the

Mayo Clinic, where it was determined that he had been suffering from a duodenal ulcer, for which he then underwent surgery. In the late 1920s Eddie became active in baseball again, this time as an umpire in the Chicago semi-pro leagues. After enduring a few years of the physical attacks and other hardships regularly visited upon the umpires working semipro games, Stack and Ed Weinstein organized the Chicago Umpires Protective Association in the early 1930s to improve pay and working conditions. The group eventually became so large and powerful in Chicago baseball that its members worked all semipro and amateur games in the city. Stack served six years as the union president.

Eddie received numerous assignments to umpire college games over the years, and so was a logical choice to serve as a freelance scout for the Detroit Tigers and Chicago White Sox, before finally retiring from umpiring in the late 1940s. He and his wife Kathryn raised a family of four boys, and Eddie finally retired from the classroom in 1956. He died in Chicago on August 28, 1958, aged 70. After a career of forty years in teaching, and nearly four decades of service to the game of baseball, it could safely be said that Eddie Stack had led a full and colorful life devoted to young people and his beloved sport.



### Why One Scribe Didn't Vote This Year

*"To be named to the Hall is supposedly the highest honor you can bestow on a ball players," observes Joe Williams, sports columnist of the New York World Telegram. 'Do they appreciate it? Well, last year we voted four of them into the shrine—Frank Frisch, Lefty Grove, Carl Hubbell and Mickey Cochrane—and not a single one showed up. They just couldn't be bothered. So this year Mr. Ken Smith and his fellow historians can include me out ... The only player to show at Cooperstown last year was Ed Walsh, who had been voted in by a special old-timers' committee. Walsh, a 40-game winner for the White Sox in 1908, composed and read a poem for the occasion. In Walsh's day, you see, the ballplayer had a great respect for the game he lived on and with.'* (The Sporting News, February 18, 1948.)

—Andy Moursund