



Ladies of the Night Game

Toronto women who pioneered ballgames played under lights

From the time it became possible to play ballgames at night, baseball purists scoffed at the idea. In 1915, the *Toronto Daily Star* declared that night baseball had always been, and would always be, a dismal failure. "When it has been tried in the United States," the sports editor explained, "the light was wretched and it was impossible to follow the flight of a baseball." In 1923, Hall of Famer Honus Wagner, syndicated in newspapers across North America, recalled an

HANS WAGNER'S BASEBALL STORY

The light was too dim to see a line fly and it was impossible to make a good catch in the outfield. To hit an ordinary baseball would have been out of the question. They had made



"As the game went along it only got worse. The players began to take night baseball as a joke."

- Honus Wagner, *Toronto Daily Star*, 12/17/1923



experimental night game he played in Wilmington, Delaware which sent disappointed patrons rushing to the box office to demand refunds. Playing under lights "made it impossible to make a good catch in the outfield," recalled the Flying Dutchman. He noted that "hitting a baseball at night was

simply out of the question." Night games were "a joke," and he assured his

readers he'd seen "the end of night baseball." Writing in the *Toronto Globe* during 1927, columnist Michael Rodden lamented that athletes of the future would likely be forced to practice at unsatisfactory hours and under the indecorous glare of arc lights.

Lou Gehrig, speaking on the radio in 1939, said that night games were "not really baseball" and "were strictly

Night baseball has been tried on a number of occasions in the United States, and has always been a dismal failure. Immense sums of money have been squandered on the effort

Animosity and Bitter Words

WHERE NIGHT BASEBALL IS UNPOPULAR.

That night baseball is not the paying proposition it is supposed to be can be gleaned from the fact that the Central League has gone on record against it. At a recent meeting of this organization nocturnal baseball was given the ban, and in future the teams in that circuit will play only in the daytime. It is said that night baseball did not pay its way in the Central League last season, but perhaps the main reason for its apparent failure now is the fact that major league clubs have given notice that minor league clubs playing under the floodlights will not get as many fans for players as those who perform in the daylight.



"Playing and practicing under arc lights is not at all satisfactory. Squads invariably have a far more difficult time perfecting plays."

- Michael J. Rodden, Columnist, *The Globe*, 10/12/1927

TWILIGHT SEASON OPENS AT THE PITS

Saints and Natives Will Clash To-night

The twilight season opens at Withersvale Park to-night when St. Peter's and Natives Sons battle it out for the leadership of the Western City League. St. Peter's surprised the fans with their fine display last Saturday at Vindict Park when they handed Royals a well 5 to 1 thrashing. The Red Caps are sure to be an improved aggregation over last season with the addition of two first-class catchers and their junior hurling star, Elmer Crowell. He will take the mound against the Sons to-night with either George O'Driscoll or George Saworth doing the catching. The battery for the

Most baseball players dislike night games. No doubt it will be a novelty for a time, the fans are likely to tire of it quickly.



"Night games are not really baseball at all. It is advantageous only to the owners' pocketbook. Baseball should be played in the sunshine."

- Lou Gehrig, KROC-AM radio, 08/22/1939



advantageous to the owners' pocketbook." Baseball, according to The Iron Horse, "should be played in the sunshine." Decades later, when Canadian author W.P. Kinsella wrote *Shoeless Joe*, his protagonist, Ray, first bonds with

the spectre of Joe Jackson by discussing the unfortunate illumination of ballparks:

“What happened to the sun?” Shoeless Joe says to me, waving his hand towards the banks of floodlights that surround the park. “Only stadium in the big leagues that doesn’t have them is Wrigley Field,” I say. “The owners found that more people could attend night games. They even play the World Series at night now.” Joe purses his lips, considering. “It’s harder to see the ball, especially at the plate.” “When there are breaks,” I add, “they usually go against the ballplayers, right?” Joe grins. “I’d play for the Devil’s own team just for the touch of a baseball. Hell, I’d play in the dark if I had to.”

By the early twentieth century, no one need play in the dark. Yet, for nearly three decades after it became practical, not a single ballgame was played under lights in the city of Toronto. Then, a group of pioneering young women, willing to play ball whenever they could during The Great Depression, played under the stars and sold tickets to the spectacle. Their success on the field, but most importantly at the box office, ensured the “new-fangled idea had come to stay” as “floodlight baseball took Toronto by storm.”

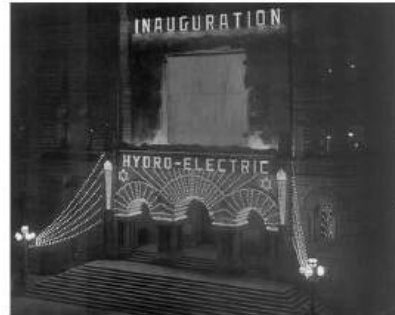
Early Electricity in Toronto

Electric lighting arrived in Toronto one evening in 1879 when two arc lights were turned on at McConkey’s restaurant at 145 Yonge Street. Power was supplied by a dynamo generator, driven by a small steam engine. McConkey’s celebrated the occasion by serving free ice cream. Independent, steam-powered generators, known as ‘dynamos,’ were the first electrical generators capable of delivering power for personal or professional use. Beginning in 1881, dynamos were used to illuminate the Canadian National Exhibition, allowing it to continue each evening until 10pm, rather than closing at sundown. Later that same year, dynamo powered electric lights were used to illuminate a sports venue for the first time in Toronto, when lamps were used to light the Adelaide Street skating rink. In June of 1883, a thirteen-hundred-pound dynamo powered lights on the outdoor curling rink at the uptown Granite Club. The Queen’s Own Rifles regimental band played an evening concert at the venue. “A great many persons spent their entire time [at the Granite] examining the dynamo-electric machine which produced the electric light,” wrote *The Globe*. “The light was quite mellow and would bring out

colours the same as the sunlight." Two years later, dynamo generators energized a small electric railway at the CNE and illuminated displays about the wonders of electricity both indoors and out.

Though ground-breaking and significant, the era of

the dynamo was destined to be short. By 1882, electrical pioneer, inventor and entrepreneur J.J. Wright had already built the first Canadian-made electric generator in the back room of the Firstbrook Box Factory in downtown Toronto.



"A great many persons spent their entire time ignoring the event and instead examining the dynamo-electric machine which produced the electric light," *The Globe*, 06/09/1883



The power and quality of electric lights steadily improved. 1885 saw the first ever organized game held outdoors under lights in Toronto: a soccer match played between the home town Torontos and a visiting team from New York at the Jarvis Street Athletic Grounds. Fourteen arc lights were installed on temporary poles around the field. To the delight of the hometown fans, who were delighted enough just to see the action at night, Toronto emerged victorious by a score of 2-1.

As demand for electricity grew into the 1890s, Toronto gained access to electricity from a number of small industrial generators that were eventually connected together. In 1894, Toronto's City Engineer Edward Keating visited and corresponded with forty-two other North American cities and towns as he investigated various methods for electrical power generation. Keating tabled a report before the Board of Works which recommended that Toronto build its own steam powered electrical generating station at a cost of \$310,200. Keating noted that Toronto currently had more gas-powered than electrical lamps, but could light both streets and parks with electricity for roughly \$75 per annum for each lamp. "The estimate is considered liberal," he told the Board. "And I may say, is largely in excess of the figures from some of the electrical companies with whom I have corresponded." City Hall didn't balk at the price. Within a week, the first contracts to build Toronto's electrical future had been tendered. Keating, who had been mentored by Sir Sanford Fleming, presciently told the Board that

Toronto's proximity to Niagara Falls would one day prove to be an electrical blessing.

By the end of 1897, Toronto had 1,079 electric arc lights on its streets, but just 17 in its parks. These were supplemented by 23 remaining "ordinary gas lamps" which the city continued to service. By 1903, Alderman Chisholm was demanding action, in the form of 125 new lamps for parks. Electrification of recreational spaces continued to advance at a snail's pace. Earlier that spring, seventeen Ontario municipalities had joined together to create a large enough market to justify the transmission of power from Niagara Falls to Toronto with diversions to towns and villages along the way. Hydro-electricity and its seemingly limitless potential was headed to Hometown.

Temporary Lighting for Outdoor Sports

The Track and Field Oval at Hanlan's Point was the first athletic venue in Toronto to regularly advertise organized sporting events at night. The Oval, part of the collection of amusements, athletic facilities and attractions on Toronto Island, would place portable arc lights, similar to those being used in theatres, alongside the track. The Oval was within home run distance of Hanlan's Point Stadium, home of Toronto's professional Maple Leafs baseball club. On September 8, 1907, with the lamps mounted on poles, a running race was billed as "a scintillating Saturday night under arc lights." Famed English distance runner Alfred Shrubbs and Maple Leafs star outfielder Jack Thoney were each featured in their own respective one-on-one challenge races. Thoney, wearing his baseball uniform, raced a lacrosse player for 100 yards and then battled another runner across 220 yards of the track. Thoney was said to be "not even trying" by the end of each of his easily won races. The *Daily Star* reported that "Thoney left last night for



"The fifty odd arc lights, which illuminated the running track at Hanlan's, died away without warning, leaving the grounds in a state of almost total darkness."
Toronto Daily Star, 09/09/1907



Cincinnati where he is fully expected to beat the world around-the-bases record." During the mile-long main event, as Shrubbs was beating American champion Thomas J. Kanaly by "a lap and a half," the lights went out. "Something unfortunately

went wrong with the electric power,” reported the correspondent on the scene. “The fifty odd arc lights, which illuminated the track, died away without warning, leaving the grounds in a state of almost total darkness.” Two years later, a 15-mile race was scheduled, this time with 100 mounted arc lights. The light flickered and nearly faltered, but thousands of paying customers were able to watch three runners round the track for nearly ninety minutes.

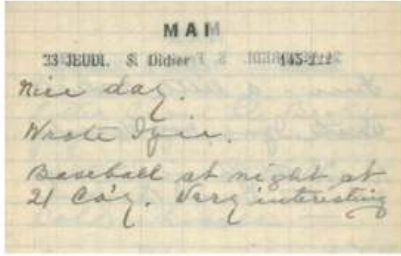
More reliable lighting was on the way. In anticipation of publicly controlled power from Niagara reaching Toronto in early 1911, the city installed 18,000 single incandescent light bulbs and, anticipating even more lights, over 30,000 poles along its streets and in its parks. On December 22, 1911, the municipal government financed the lighting of a temporary skating rink built inside Varsity Stadium for the winter. The skating pond was 100ft x 200ft, and the new hydro-electric power ensured its surface was well lit and its dressing rooms well heated. In the ensuing years circuses, red carpet arrivals, lakeshore swims, Royal Visits, lawn bowling lanes, cycling tracks, livestock competitions and rugby games were all staged under temporarily constructed lighting rigs in Toronto. In time, arc lights gave way to more

powerful and reliable flood lights. The baseball park on Hanlan’s Point was outfitted with at least three flood lights which could be mounted along the top of the grandstand whenever a rugby match, football game or starlit opera required light.



Hanlan’s Point stadium was home to the Toronto Maple Leafs baseball club for 25 seasons after the first illuminated sporting event was held in Toronto. Not a single night game was ever played there.

It is worth noting here that during the First World War, Canada’s Forestry Corps and the all-Black No. 2 Construction Battalion formed an integrated baseball team which played games against other soldiers behind the lines. By June of 1917, the Forestry Corps, which included soldiers from Toronto, had generator-powered lighting rigs erected on tall poles. These makeshift work lights allowed the



"...many other aspects of First World War operations had been wired. Turning lights toward a baseball field may account for the Forestry and Construction groups being among the very few baseball teams, anywhere in the world, who participated in night games during 1917."



Foresters to complete their duties through the night at their camp in Jura, France. The war diary of the No. 2 reveals regularly scheduled baseball games at night, presumably under those same lights. Illuminated baseball games were exceedingly rare in 1917 and the

frequency and fixed location of these games was likely a global singularity.

Permanent Lighting for Outdoor Sports

As the Twenties began to roar, the high voltage wires began to hum. Reliable, permanent illumination for sports came first to Toronto parks. Both Moss Park and Jesse Ketchum Park were noted spots for rugby, hockey and soccer players to practice and play after dark. Lighting towers were erected at a tennis court along the Humber River, and by 1923, the field used by the Parkdale Senior football team had permanent hydro-powered lights.



"The Toronto Amateur Athletic Club's hockey team will practice tonight at the Moss Park rink, Shuter street. Twelve arc lights have been installed." *The Globe*, 09/26/1911

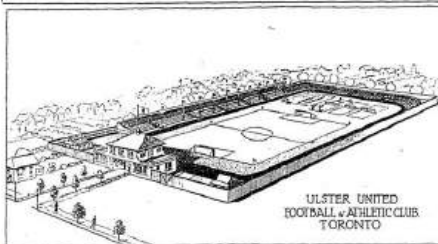


Yet, despite a growing number of spaces where games could be played at night, no baseball leagues or teams took up the torch. Afternoon baseball games remained the overwhelming norm. Teams playing in the Toronto Playgrounds League down in Christie Pits, or the Beaches League in the east, or even the Toronto Maple Leafs of the International League in their brand new (floodlightless) Maple Leaf Stadium, played most games at 3:00pm or 4:00pm on a weekend or "twilight games" beginning around 6:00pm on weeknights.

In 1930, Sunnyside Stadium on the Lake Ontario shore, Ulster Stadium in the city's east end, and Oakwood Stadium on St. Clair Avenue West became, in that order, the first stadia in Toronto to feature purpose-built, permanent floodlights.

Ulster Stadium, a ten-thousand-seater nestled in Toronto's residential Leslieville neighbourhood, primarily hosted soccer. Its grandstand and standing area were

New Ulster Athletic Field on Greenwood Avenue



“Neath the brilliant floodlights of Ulster Stadium on Greenwood Avenue, the rugby season will officially open tonight.”
Toronto Daily Star, 10/09/1930



often full when visiting European teams, such as those of the English Football Association, paid a visit to Toronto. Within two weeks of lights being installed in mid-October of 1930, the stadium immediately hosted night time soccer, football and, for the first time ever under lights in

Canada, rugby games. No baseball games were being played under the lights at Ulster Stadium.

Oakwood Stadium, located at Oakwood Avenue and St. Clair West, was originally a track and field facility with a grandstand. Oakwood's inner field was used for soccer, rugby and football. The permanent lights for the stadium were designed by noted Toronto athlete and architect Jim Crang. They were erected in late October, 1930. A rugby league scheduled Wednesday night games for every week until the snow fell. By the 1950s, Oakwood Stadium had been converted into a successful stock-car race track. No baseball games were being played under the lights at Oakwood Stadium.

Sunnyside Stadium was different from the others. It was built in 1925 as one structure among many others at Sunnyside Amusement Park, “the playground by the lake.” The three-thousand seat stadium was specifically designed for use by



female athletes who were still a curiosity during the nineteen twenties. Sunnyside

became the first stadium in Toronto to be affixed with permanent lights in August of 1930. The 24,000-watt floodlight system was financed and installed by the Toronto Harbour Commission. Somewhat fittingly, the stadium stood on the shore of Lake Ontario in between two of the massive steel towers carrying the 110,000-volt powerlines filled with hydroelectricity from Niagara Falls. In appearance, purpose, and now features, Sunnyside Stadium stood out. Something else was different about Sunnyside Stadium: she was a ballpark.



"Sunnyside stadium is the first in Toronto to be permanently affixed with floodlights." *The Globe*, 08/15/1930

Softball and Baseball Games Under Lights in the City of Toronto

Baseball at night was still considered somewhat uncouth in 1930. At the conclusion of its season, the Central League in the United States went so far as to "give nocturnal baseball the ban." In 1931, the brass of the CL opined, "teams in our circuit will play only in the daytime." The Buffalo Bisons hosted the Montreal Royals in what was billed as the "first night baseball game in the East," on July 3, 1930. One skeptic outside the ballpark told the travelling *Globe* reporter that he'd wasted a trip. "The players will not be able to see the ball because the sphere will be out of sight most of the time." In Toronto, the *Daily Star* spoke to baseball fans outside Sunnyside Stadium and asked their opinions on night games. Frederick Lyonde told the paper he was convinced baseball under lights was impossible. Isobel Hanes, an athlete herself, said she didn't think she'd like to play under lights very often. An anonymous fan was quoted as saying it wouldn't make a difference for the umpires, since blind men can't see anyway.

So, with baseball either experimenting, reluctant or openly hostile, it fell to softball to christen Toronto's night time diamonds. By 1930, amateur, semi-professional and professional softball had become very popular with female athletes. The game exploded in popularity after the end of the First World War and by 1920 baseball for women had been replaced by softball. Sunnyside Stadium had existed as Toronto's female softball facility since 1925. From the day

it opened, competitors in three different leagues played in front of huge paying crowds. The National League, The Major League and The Sunnyside League hosted both daytime and twilight games at the stadium nearly every single day during the summers. Canadian track and field legend Bobbie Rosenfeld was already internationally famous, having won gold and silver Olympic medals in



Amsterdam, when she agreed to manage and play for the Sunnyside version of the Maple Leafs. Her presence gave games at Sunnyside Stadium a boost in both popularity and press. In a decade dominated by “crazes” and “fads” the women playing softball on the lakeshore, and regularly smashing home runs

into the water or onto Lakeshore Boulevard, had no trouble selling seats.

Likely as a result of strong attendance, newspaper coverage of the women who played softball at Sunnyside was considerable. Images of catcher Isobel Savage, infielder Pat Turnbull and outfielder Dot Annis appeared in the *Toronto Daily Star*; all were described as “pretty damsels of Sunnyside diamond fame.” Daily sports columnist Lou Marsh regularly wrote about softball in the city, including the women’s game. Pioneering sports columnist



Alexandrine Gibb covered the “news and views of feminine activities” in her *No Man’s Land of Sport* column. Gibb not only gave extensive coverage to the three leagues operating at Sunnyside, but through her gifted writing, described the games in a fashion that undoubtedly sold tickets. During the 1929 season, Gibb kept tabs on the trash talk emanating from the dugouts at Sunnyside. Boosters could buy tickets just to hear a lady swear. Gibb described the gimmicks being employed by Sunnyside promoters to exploit the expletives:

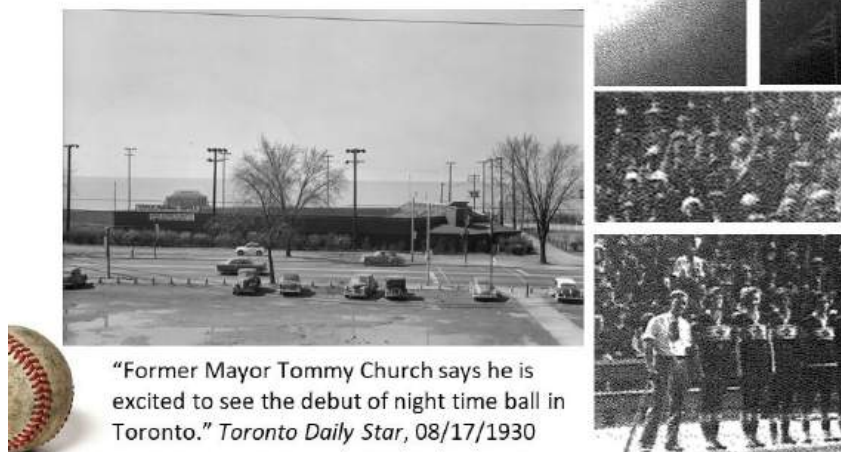


"The Toronto Women's Softball Association has arranged for four burly 'bobbies' to be on hand... to control both patrons and players" *The Toronto Daily Star*, 07/15/1929

"The Toronto Women's Softball Association has arranged for four burly bobbies to be on hand. At the first inappropriate remark from the sidelines, the offender will be dragged out into the middle of the diamond where all can take a look at the 'hero' who calls names."

In July of 1930, Billy D'Alexandro, President of the Toronto Women's Softball Association, and John F. "Duke" McGarry, President of Sunnyside's National Softball League, announced that Sunnyside Stadium, which continued to operate as normal while lights were installed, would host Toronto's first ballgame under the stars. On August 18, the Supremes would take on the Lakesides in a seven-inning affair. The organizers elected not to honour season passes for the night game, nor would any seats be reserved. Any fan wishing to attend the game needed to buy their tickets, with prices slightly elevated of course, at the stadium box office during business hours between August 15 and first pitch at 9:30pm on the 18th. The game needed to start late owing to "absolute darkness being necessary for the floodlights to operate." Rower and Olympic silver medalist Jack Guest, sprinter and Olympic champion Percy Williams and high jumper, Olympic champion and former baseball stand-out Ethel Catherwood would all be on hand for ceremonies before the game. When the lighting system was tested on the eve of the event, "the floodlights at the girls softball stadium were pronounced perfect by players who caught fly balls and picked up grounders for thirty minutes under the lights." The players present for the test were informed that tickets for their game were selling fast.

August 18, 1930 presented perfect weather for softball. Two lines of people, four deep, stretched along the boardwalk, anxiously waiting for the gates to open. Close to 3,000 people

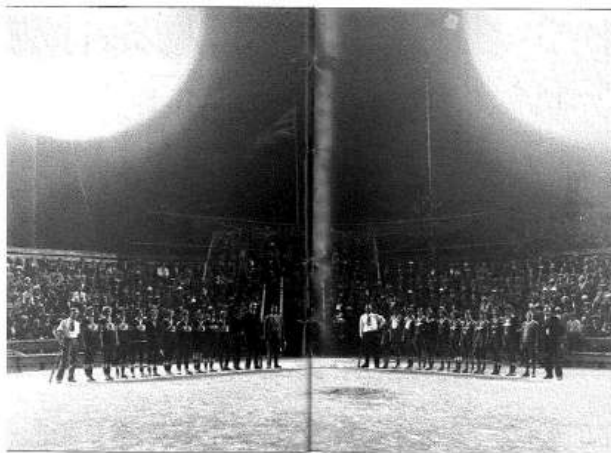


"Former Mayor Tommy Church says he is excited to see the debut of night time ball in Toronto." *Toronto Daily Star*, 08/17/1930

happily shelled out twenty-five cents each. Tommy Church, the former mayor of Toronto who while in office helped organize the shipment of baseball equipment to Canadian soldiers during the First World War, helped kick off the opening ceremonies before the sun went down and was happy “to see Toronto’s first softball played at night.”

Over 3,000 enthusiastic fans waited eagerly, then impatiently, in the growing darkness. Some began calling for the lights to be turned on. At 9:05pm, the switch was flipped and the audience literally saw the future of ballgames in Toronto. “A gasp of astonishment swept through the stands,” wrote the witness for the *Daily Star*. “In a few seconds the bewilderment had subsided and as every corner of the field was plainly seen, the fans quickly realized the possibilities of perfect ball.”

Ethel Catherwood tossed out the ceremonial first pitch, surrounded by other




dignitaries, municipal politicians and the assembled press. The players and coaches then formed two neat columns along the baselines for the official photograph. With the moment immortalized, the Supremes’ battery of Marge Ellerby and Dot Humpage took their

positions. Then, Lakesides leadoff hitter Hilda Thomas became the first person in Toronto to ever dig in at the plate with electric lights, rather than sunlight, illuminating her batter’s eye. The game see-sawed and featured some brilliant hitting and fielding. In the end, the Lakesides were victorious by a score of 12-7.

Despite the long and notable list of disbelievers, skeptics and naysayers, both spectators and players were pleased and satisfied with the innovation of ballgames at night. The game was said to flow “the same as in daylight” and was considered “a big success.” McGarry said, “The game as played under floodlights is just what is needed.” D’Alexandro was even more enthusiastic: “Floodlight baseball is a wonderful thing for the playoffs. There will now be no need to hurry through supper, or to dash away and leave dishes in the sink. The players do not seem to be under any strain and their fielding is just as good as it ever was.” Mrs.

Joe Wright, a fan in the stands, unknowingly predicted the future with absolute clarity: "I think floodlight baseball will be much more popular than daytime baseball. Many more fans will be able to conveniently get down to watch a game." The crowds at Sunnyside kept coming after dinner and the dishes. Crowds in excess of 2,000 paying customers remained common at night games for the remainder of the summer. For comparison's sake, the professional men playing in their brand-new lakefront stadium, the 1934 International League champion Toronto Maple Leafs, averaged just 1,793 fans per game.

Maple Leaf Stadium	Sunnyside Stadium
<p>Team Record: 87-80 Ballpark: Maple Leaf Stadium Attendance: 121,431, Avg. 1,454 <small>1930 Toronto Maple Leafs Statistics</small></p>	<p>over two thousand fans shelled out</p>
<p>Team Record: 83-84 Ballpark: Maple Leaf Stadium Attendance: 102,143, Avg. 1,223 <small>1931 Toronto Maple Leafs Statistics</small></p>	<p>on Monday at 9.15, and the 3,000 tickets available are going fast.</p>
<p>Team Record: 54-113 Ballpark: Maple Leaf Stadium Attendance: 49,963, Avg. 598 <small>1932 Toronto Maple Leafs Statistics</small></p>	<p>a large crowd. It was estimated between 4,000 and 5,000 people witnessed the game.</p>
 <p>"I think floodlight baseball will be much more popular. Fans can easily get down to the stadium to watch a game." Mrs. J Wright, <small>The Toronto Daily Star, 08/19/1930</small></p>	<p>with the idea of drawing the biggest gate possible. Girl athletes should not be exploited in this way. The girls</p>

Sunnyside Amusement Park, long illuminated and operating into the night, immediately recognized the business benefit associated with thousands of fans streaming out of Sunnyside Stadium and into the amusement park. The August 20 inter-city twilight game featuring the Hamilton Gurry's and Bobbie Rosenfeld's Maple Leafs, was quickly converted to a night game. Games were next held under lights on August 28 and August 29 and night games became the norm for the 1930 playoff schedule. The Maple Leafs won the Sunnyside playoffs and then beat the St. Thomas Purples in the Provincial semi-finals. All the games in that series were played at night after St. Thomas installed light towers on their diamond in September. The Sunnyside Maple Leafs went on to sweep their old rivals from Hamilton, winning the final game 22-6, capturing the Ontario softball crown for 1930.

For over three years, Toronto's women remained the only ballplayers hitting and fielding at night. Sunnyside Stadium continued to host night games through the 1931, 1932, and 1933 seasons. The evidence regarding the integrity of game play was overwhelming and the lost revenue for reluctant leagues was becoming foolhardy. Amateur men's baseball teams in such Ontario cities as London and St. Thomas, as well as professional men's teams across North America, were regularly playing games under lights by 1932. Yet, Toronto The Good was Toronto The Stubborn when it came to male ballplayers playing at night. There was such



"Acorn park has been improved to such an extent that it now rates among the best grandstands in Canada... good views of softball." *The Globe*, 06/09/1933

"NUT" LEAGUE AT ACORN PARK

The second league which is to operate at the new Acorn Park this season held a meeting last night.

of a grandstand to seat 4,000 people



success for women playing night games that a second lighted location, Acorn Park, was opened to invite even more paying customers. The ladies of the Acorn Park Softball League played before a 3,000-seat grandstand in a residential neighbourhood south of College Street.

The Toronto Amateur Baseball Association finally brought men, and the game of baseball, under the lights for the first time in Toronto on September 4, 1933. A playoff game between the Beaches and Valley Views was scheduled for Ulster Stadium with an 8:30pm start. The event was met with little fanfare or recognition, though *The Globe* wondered if night time baseball would "further popularize" the men's game.

Nine days later, Toronto's male softball championship was slated to be played under the Ulster Stadium lights. Throughout 1934, amateur and semi-

T.A.B.A. Senior Semi-Final Game Scheduled at Ulster Stadium

Amateur baseball fans will be provided with an interesting attraction tonight at Ulster Stadium, under floodlights, at 8 o'clock, when Siberrys, champions of the Viaduct League, will meet Findlay Dairy, West Toronto champions, in a sudden-death game of the T.A.B.A. semi-finals.



"With floodlights installed, it would be possible to play a number of baseball games." *The Globe* 03/07/1932

BENEFIT SOFTBALL TUESDAY EVENING

Leaf Hockey Stars and Osler Ball Players Clash



professional men and women played ballgames under lights in the city of Toronto at Sunnyside Stadium, Acorn Park and Ulster Stadium. When Honus Wagner wrote in 1923 that he'd seen the end of night baseball, he failed to consider improving technologies, economic necessities and the pioneering spirit of those damsels of Sunnyside diamond fame.

The Toronto Maple Leafs Follow Suit

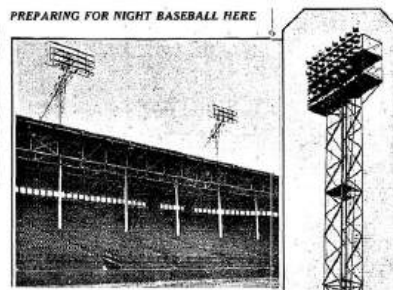
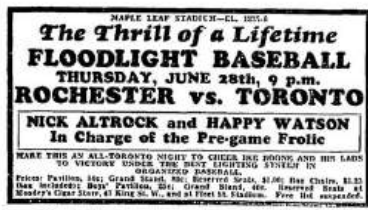
In March of 1934, the Toronto Harbour Commission, builders of the Sunnyside light standards, revived what the *Daily Star* called the "dead idea" of floodlights at Maple Leaf Stadium. The Harbour board elected to start work on light towers for the municipally controlled Fleet Street ballpark as soon as weather permitted.

Management of the International League Maple Leafs believed lights would allow the Leafs and their fans to participate “in nocturnal sport” at least two or three times per week. Columnist Lou Marsh, who’d been writing about the successes at Sunnyside for nearly four years, criticized the city for not building lights sooner at Toronto’s municipal stadium. The fact that the ballpark had not been optimized for night time use by other teams, events and local organizations was “poppycock” according to Marsh. Lights would finally allow the “municipally owned stadium to be put to its fullest use by the local sports world.” Indeed, simply the promise of lights in March was enough for Toronto promoter Jack Corcoran to book the facility for football and professional wrestling events in July.

On June 9, the Maple Leafs organization and the Harbour Commission followed the lead of the Sunnyside women and began construction on eight light towers on top of and around Maple Leaf Stadium. The work was completed by June 20 and, demonstrating the obvious business sense of the lights, the Maple Leafs scheduled their first night game for just eight days thereafter. The steel used to build the towers, light fixtures, bulbs and reflecting mirrors all came from Canadian firms. The outfield light towers stood 93 feet tall and weighed over seven tons. The combined illumination power of the new lighting set-up was over 19 million candlepower.

The Leafs placed ads in the various daily papers calling their June 28 first-ever night game vs Rochester the “event of the baseball season” and “the thrill of a lifetime. This is an all-Toronto night to cheer the lads to victory under the best

lighting system in organized baseball.” Former Chicago White Sox, vaudevillian and on-field comedian Nick Altrock was hired to provide a pre-game frolic before the baseball began at 9:00pm. The lighting system “was a great success” as Rochester beat the Maple Leafs 8-2.

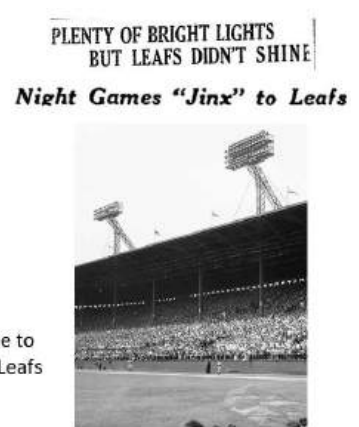
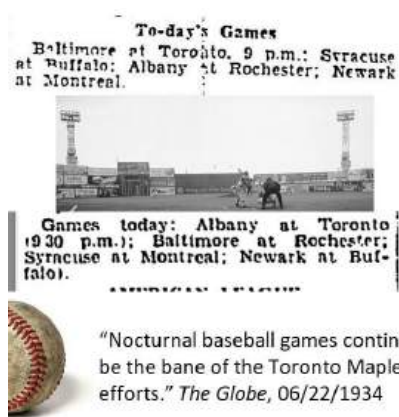


“The light towers are built throughout with structural steel fabricated by Canadian firms based in Hamilton.” *The Toronto Daily Star*, 06/22/1934

NO TWILIGHT TILTS DEMANDS GAMES UNDER ARCS

The *Daily Star* recorded there were “plenty of bright lights” at Maple leaf Stadium, “but the Leafs did not shine.” The Leafs played fifteen more night games during 1934, raising their average attendance by nearly a thousand fans. During a

crucial pennant race series with the Montreal Royals, Montreal's field manager and future president of the International League, Frank Shaughnessy, demanded that the Royals play only under lights in Toronto, or else he would remove his players from the field. He stated that Royals players didn't like the afternoon or twilight conditions at Maple Leaf Stadium one bit. This protest may have been strategic on the part of Shaughnessy as the Leafs were "jinxed" and had a dismal record under lights in 1934. The Maple Leafs shook off any bad electrical mojo they may have had, winning the International League championship later that fall.



"Nocturnal baseball games continue to be the bane of the Toronto Maple Leafs efforts." *The Globe*, 06/22/1934

The lights erected in the outfield at Maple Leaf Stadium could be seen clear across

the waterfront from the Leslie Street Spit. They served as a beacon of the future. Within a few years, no professional baseball team in Toronto would ever play a majority of games under the sun again. Night time ballgames, whose proof of concept in Toronto was

Notable first ballgames at night

Temporary Lights

- Sept 2, 1880 – Hull, Massachusetts, Edison employees demonstrate game under string lights
- Spring 1899 – Wilmington, Delaware, Wagner & Louisville Cardinals vs. Peaches play under string lights
- Sept 9, 1910 Comiskey Park, Chicago – game between local amateur teams under arc lights on poles
- May 22, 1917 – La Joux, France, Black and white Canadian soldiers play together under forestry operation lights
- Summer, 1929 – Kansas City Monarchs barnstorm with portable arc-light system (vaudeville stage)

Permanent Stadium Light Towers

- May 2, 1930 – Des Moines, Iowa, Demons vs Wichita Aviators
- Aug 18, 1930 – Toronto, Sunnyside Stadium, Supremes vs Lakesides
- June 28, 1934 – Toronto, Maple Leaf Stadium, Leafs vs Rochester



"...even Mary Pickford attended a game at Sunnyside Stadium, Toronto's first stadium equipped with lights for games after dark." – Heritage Plaque



pioneered and solidified by the ladies of Sunnyside and Acorn parks, became, as the lights themselves: a permanent fixture.

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