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Glens Falls: Home of Champions ... and Cheap Fans

By Maury Thompson

It was heralded as a “fine coup” that “assures for Glens Falls a new baseball era” when the New York Giants located a semi-professional farm team at Glens Falls in 1923.

“John McGraw, manager of the New York Giants baseball team, wishes to make the 1923 Glens Falls baseball team one of his club’s most important ‘farms,’ a training team for the younger Giants who have been tried at this season’s training camp and are too fine to drop, but not quite mature enough to become members of the world’s champion team,” *The Post-Star* reported on April 4, 1923.

Yet the team, which played at Crandall Park, abruptly disbanded part way through its second season.

It wasn’t because of poor attendance.

An estimated 4,300 people turned out for the 1923 season opener, at which the team defeated the D and H Generals of Albany, 6-3.

“The largest crowd that has gathered at a local park saw what was unanimously pronounced in its after-game fanning as the smartest team by a far cry that has ever worn the Glens Falls uniform,” *The Post-Star* reported on June 25.

“Paul Kenney took to the mound after Mayor (Charles) Cool had flung an out-drop that should have had more tangential English on it, or something.”

Kenney, a local standout, was hired in 1924 as physical director at Sheffield Prep school in Connecticut.

It wasn't because of lack of talent.

The team achieved a 31-16 record in the 1923 season.

The line-up, at various times, included George Sisco, “a crack outfielder” who had played a portion of a season with the Giants, outfielder Eddie Farrell, who was called up to the Giants in 1924, Bud Kelly, who had worked out with the Giants in spring training, and player/coach “Laughing” Larry Doyle, a former Giants second baseman who had played 14 seasons in the Major League.

The team took the name the “Doylies,” in honor of Doyle.

It was felt that Doyle's association with the team, in and of itself, would attract out-of-town fans to Recreation Field at Glens Falls' Crandall Park to watch the former Giants captain in action.

Doyle won the Chalmer Award for the National League's most outstanding player in 1912, and led the National League in hitting, with a .320 batting average, in 1915, *The Post-Star* reported on March 2, 1974, at the time of Doyle's death.

Throughout his Major League career, Doyle had 1,887 hits, including 74 homeruns, in 6,509 at bats, according to baseball-reference.com.

In 1922, Doyle had been manager of the Nashville Volunteers of the Southern League, a Class A minor league.

Management attributed the failure of the Glens Falls team to a flawed financial model which relied, in essence, on voluntary admission donations.

Crandall Park policy prohibited charging admission to events.

So those who attended were asked to voluntarily purchase score cards in lieu of admission, but many of those who attended did not.

“Meeting Saturday morning after a last desperate drive for funds to raise the \$6,000 debt, the Glens Falls Baseball Commission voted to disband the city's team after its two weekend engagements,” *The Post-Star* reported on Aug. 25, 1924.

“This is the first time in recent history that a city sports project has failed,” the report continued. “Failure was due to an increase in the population of a peculiar type of sports slackers – persons who take advantage of the no-forced-admission rule at Recreation Field to attend local games without purchasing score cards. The number of these people so increased over last season that it wrecked the club.”

Financing the team had been a stretch from the beginning.

The team closed out the 1923 season with a small deficit, which increased in 1924.

At the start, the Giants organization had agreed to establish a team in Glens Falls if a volunteer commission, which local businessman George F. Bayle Jr. chaired, could sell 1,000 advance season tickets at \$10 each – the equivalent of \$183 in 2024 dollars.

The commission operated on a similar model as the current Adirondack Civic Center Coalition, which operates Cool Insuring Arena and owns the Adirondack Thunder hockey team.

At the end of the day on April 20, 1923, the commission was still \$3,800 short of its \$10,000 goal.

“Today there will be a whirlwind climax to the drive put on in which every solicitor will pester the dickens out of whatever recalcitrant fans he still has on his list and do what he can to make the team a one hundred percent successful one,” *The Post-Star* reported on April 21.

The commission raised another \$1,600, and it was voted to move forward, despite still being \$2,200 short of the goal.

Doyle’s hiring was announced May 10.

There was excitement when he arrived in town a little over a week later.

“Larry Doyle got in last night and registered at the Rockwell House. ... As evidence of his permanence, Larry brought with him his wife and his daughter,” *The Post-Star* reported on May 19.

“Many local fans drifted around Doyle in the lobby of the hotel last night and there was a fanning bee that lasted late. Doyle is intimately cognizant of present-day affairs in the big league, but the talk last night held for the most part upon the Christy Matthewson days of the Giants, when Doyle captained the team and was in the height of his playing days.”

Doyle and Matthewson were roommates on Giants road trips.

Doyle began holding workouts for local prospects on May 31, and he made local appearances to promote the team.

Doyle was set to umpire the St. Mary’s Academy vs. Glens Falls game the next day, *The Post-Star* reported on June 2.

“Laughing Larry will work with Howard Montgomery, and the crew could turn out to be as satisfactory an officiating crew as has ever been in charge of a local school game.”

Doyle was known as “Laughing” Larry because of his whimsical personality and constant laugh.

He was known for the quip, “It’s great to be young and be a Giant.”

Doyle would return to the Adirondack region in 1942 when he contracted tuberculosis and was a patient at the Trudeau Sanitarium in Saranac Lake.

He recovered, bought a house in the village, and lived at Saranac Lake until his death on March 1, 1974, at age 87.

At the time of his death, Glens Falls sports fans still regarded Doyle as a local baseball legend.

“Whenever I saw him over the years, he’d always ask for the people here in Glens Falls,” retired Glens Falls Recreation Commissioner Daniel Reardon was quoted in *The Post-Star* on March 2, 1974.

“He was a good man to play ball for – first class,” said Glens Falls Fire Chief Le Roy Akins Sr., who played rightfield on the Doylies.