

Bates Bobcast Episode 187: Bates Baseball's First Big Leaguer, Harry Lord '08

Bob Muldoon graduated from Bates in 1981 with a degree in economics and earned a Masters from Columbia in 1991. He played a year of lacrosse at Bates for Web Harrison and later became a bit of a boxer at Columbia. But his real passion: early 20th century baseball.

Recently, Muldoon found himself looking up the story of Harry Lord, a Mainer from the class of 1908. Starting in the fall of 1904, Lord only spent a little under a year on the Bates campus as a student. But his story is a wild one, culminating in him playing nine years in Major League Baseball and returning to Bates during World War I to coach the team he'd left in the lurch 13 years earlier.

Muldoon is the author of a novel on his beloved Hartford Whalers hockey team. But this story about an early Bates baseball great is all true. Here's Muldoon on his interest in history, the Bobcats, and Harry Lord.

Interview Highlights

- "(Harry Lord) played football the whole (1904) season and he was kind of a star. He scored two touchdowns against Colby, had an 80-yard run, but also in the Colby game, he was ejected for what they called slugging, which I guess was fighting. That game Bates won big, 23-0 and it got out of hand. But so the baseball season started and as the season started, Bates had incredibly and this was eye-opening to me: two future major league players on the team, a guy named C.W. Messenger, Charles Walter Messenger, and Harry Lord. And both Messenger and Lord had played football and they were both stars of the team. So the first game Bates had two future major league players, but after the second game, Messenger just disappeared from campus."
- "Harry wasn't showing up for (baseball) games. Then all of a sudden Harry appeared playing for a team. Bates was playing a team called the Portland Pine Tree Athletic Association. And Harry suddenly appeared playing for that team against Bates, leading off and playing third base. It was a semi-pro team. And I think Harry had played there the season before. I mean, the summer before Bates and was getting \$25 a game. So he dropped out of Bates, returned to that summer league team for \$25 a game and played against Bates. It was astounding to me."
- "He was a hard-headed guy. You got maybe a preview of that at Bates where he had the slugging incident against Colby and football where he got kicked out, and then he dropped out of Bates. And started playing against them. He was the captain of the Red Sox in 1909 and had that great season where he was fourth in batting. And then in 1910, he got hit by a pitch from Walter Johnson, the Hall of Fame pitcher, who was one of the hardest throwers. And Harry wanted to take some time off, go back to Maine and recuperate. And the manager

and owner didn't like that idea. But Harry insisted on it and things soured pretty quickly from there.”

- “And all of a sudden he (C.W. Messenger) emerges, in 1909, Charles Walter, whose nickname was Bobby Messenger, played baseball for the Chicago White Sox, from 1909 to 1911. And that was while Harry Lord came to the team in 1910. So Lord and Messenger, who were backfield mates at Bates, might've lived in Parker Hall together, started playing baseball together, played for the Chicago White Sox for a couple seasons. Messenger was not a star. I think he played 57 games over the course of parts of four seasons. And his lifetime average was .172. But, he made it to the big leagues.”
- “For the 1918 season, Bates needed an interim coach. There was a committee and they turned to Harry Lord. So I don't know if Harry Lord was trying to do his old school, like a good turn after leaving them mid-season. And then worse than that, being a Benedict Arnold, playing against them twice for the Portland Pine Tree Association, both games Bates lost. And Harry led off for the other team. But Harry Lord came back to Bates and coached the war-shortened 1918 team to a 4-4 record. And there's a note in the Bates Student that even during the season, at least one player on the baseball team was drafted. So, yeah, Harry Lord returned to Bates.”

Interview Transcript

Bob: As a boy, I was interested in baseball history, early baseball history, near the turn of the century because it seemed like the players are very colorful and there were a lot of characters. It seemed less of a business then. So I had that interest. My Uncle Warren of Lowell, Massachusetts challenged me to recite “Casey at the Bat” by heart. So I learned that as a boy and my fondness for baseball kind of grew. I was reading a lot of early baseball history. In fact, I can recall when I was coming up to Bates as a freshman, I was reading a book, a biography of Ty Cobb. And in that book, there's a tragic story. Ty Cobb's father returned unexpectedly from a business trip to his home and his mother mistook him for an intruder and killed him. And I remember telling that anecdote to my new roommate, Sam Rodman, who's now an Episcopal Bishop in North Carolina.

Bob: And I think Sam didn't know what to make of a new roommate who was talking about someone being killed in their own room or house. And I'm not sure if that caused him to pray a little more. But long story short, I had this interest and at some point, I can't remember exactly when, Harry Lord came on my radar screen, but reading a lot of that history, it mentioned Harry Lord of Bates College. And he was a star. And in 1909, he was the captain of the Boston Red Sox. And he batted .315, with 89 runs scored and 36 stolen bases. And he was fourth in the league in average behind three Hall of Famers, Ty Cobb, Eddie Collins and Nap Lajoie. I was fascinated that here was this Bates guy and in 1911, he even did better.

Bob: By then, he was the captain of the Chicago White Sox. He hit .326, 103 runs scored, 43 stolen bases. So it interested me that there was a Bates guy who was the star and in baseball at the turn of the century. And at some point I was interested in him. I went on eBay and I ordered a card, that Harry Lord T206 baseball card, a Tobacco card, which is of the same vintage as the famous Honus Wagner card that T206 card, that went on auction for over a million. And I also got a Harry Lord pin. I

wasn't spending a lot of money on these things, but it kind of was dormant there until recently.

Bob: I was on a Bates College Facebook page called Sons of Slovenski for track guys. And I started conversing with Ira Waldman, class of '73, who expressed an interest, that Bates should have a Hall of Fame for its athletic great athletes and its heritage, and started conversing with him. And he kind of lit a fire under me, that was a cool idea. And then I wanted to learn more about Harry Lord. I know about his pro career a little bit, but I didn't know anything about his Bates career, and all it said was Harry Lord class of '08. If you go on Wikipedia, it says Harry Lord graduated from Bates College in 1908 and was a pitcher. And, there are newspaper articles from that time, which also referred to him as a Bates graduate. And even the Bates Student in 2014 did the 10 greatest athletes in Bates history. And they referred to Harry Lord as a Bates graduate.

Bob: I wanted to look more into his Bates life, but I didn't really know how to do it. So Ira kind of got me started on, you can go into the old Bates Student newspapers. They're all digitized. You can go to the Bates yearbooks, the Mirror, they're digitized. And then he also gave me some hints on archives of old newspapers, and like the Lewiston Sun and the Lewiston Evening Journal and the Boston papers. So that's where I really got excited about, shed a light on this unknown part of Harry Lord's life. What did he do at Bates College? He started out in 1904.

Aaron: And so for Harry Lord, 1904, he steps on campus. He actually makes a big impact with the football team that fall. And then he starts on the baseball team in '05, but then something kind of went awry and ended up playing against Bates later in that year. Tell us about that.

Bob: He played football the whole season and he was kind of a star. He scored two touchdowns against Colby, had an 80-yard run, but also in the Colby game, he was ejected for what they called slugging, which I guess was fighting. That game Bates won big, 23-0 and it got out of hand. But so the baseball season started and as the season started, Bates had incredibly and this was eye-opening to me: two future major league players on the team, a guy named C.W. Messenger, Charles Walter Messenger, and Harry Lord. And both Messenger and Lord had played football and they were both stars of the team. So the first game Bates had two future major league players, but after the second game, Messenger just disappeared from campus.

Bob: So that's a mystery to me, but getting back to Lord. So Lord played and was the star of the baseball team. He was third base, he led off, he hit a home run in his first game that they played against Hebron. That was the game that this other guy Messenger was there. But at one point in the season, his play started curtailing and it turns out Harry met a woman and fell in love after the University of Maine game, which was like the ninth game in the season. And then he just disappeared. He stopped playing and it turned out that he got married. He was 22 years old, which was a little old for a freshman in that era, but they didn't always do it exactly like we do it. You know, maybe they, I don't know if they were taking gap years, but so Harry suddenly disappeared.

Bob: The more I researched though...And so I kept reading, I kept following in the papers, Harry wasn't showing up for games. Then all of a sudden Harry appeared playing for a team. Bates was playing a team called the Portland Pine Tree Athletic Association. And Harry suddenly appeared playing for that team against Bates, leading off and playing third base. It was a semi-pro team. And I think Harry had played there the season before. I mean, the summer before Bates and was getting

\$25 a game. So he dropped out of Bates, returned to that summer league team for \$25 a game and played against Bates. It was astounding to me.

Aaron: In that year's 1905 Bates baseball team actually had one of our worst records in quite some time, in fact started the year with two major leaguers, but both ended up leaving the team. I mean, that's pretty tough luck isn't it?

Bob: Their record that year ended up being 3-13 and looking back, that was the worst season in 21 years. After Harry got married and left, the team, Bates played Colby in two games and Colby had a pitcher named Jack Coombs who ended up being a star major league player for the Philadelphia Athletics. He graduated from Colby in 1906 as a chemistry major. And right after graduating from Colby in 1906 within a week, he pitched a shutout for the Philadelphia Athletics under Connie Mack. But the sad part of the story, at least for baseball buffs is Harry never faced, whose nickname became "Colby" Jack Coombs in the two games that Colby played against Bates. He had dropped off the team by then.

Aaron: After he leaves Bates, he's playing for, I guess you could say, semi-pro, there wasn't an official minor league system there, but kind of minor league teams, basically. How did he end up emerging and debuting with the Red Sox, just a few years later?

Bob: He ended up taking a job in 1905 in Boston, as a collector for some firms and he wasn't happy. It was a business job and he happened to be coming home from Boston on Christmas Eve. He was on a boat from Boston to Portland and he happened to bump into his old football coach at Bates, whose name is Royce Davis Purinton who was class of 1900 and who had coached the 1904 football team. And Harry expressed his dissatisfaction with life as a businessman in Boston. And his Bates coach Purinton said, well, why don't you try baseball, professional baseball? And I guess Harry's eyes lit up. And Purinton had some connections in the New England league. He knew a guy named Fred Doe, who was the owner of the team New Bedford Whalers in New Bedford, Massachusetts. And he arranged for Harry to have a tryout in 1906. And Harry made the team and was a star. You know, his star started rising.

Aaron: He had a pretty long major league career, but he definitely, he liked to stir the pot a little bit. He kind of forced his way out of Boston, went to Chicago, forced his way out of there. Went to the Federal League at the end of his career. It seems like his personality was one where he definitely had his opinions about things and made them known, it sounds like. Is that fair?

Bob: He was a hard-headed guy. You got maybe a preview of that at Bates where he had the slugging incident against Colby and football where he got kicked out, and then he dropped out of Bates. And started playing against them. He was the captain of the Red Sox in 1909 and had that great season where he was fourth in batting. And then in 1910, he got hit by a pitch from Walter Johnson, the Hall of Fame pitcher, who was one of the hardest throwers. And Harry wanted to take some time off, go back to Maine and recuperate. And the manager and owner didn't like that idea. But Harry insisted on it and things soured pretty quickly from there.

Bob: He came back and he was a little bit persona non grata. They gave his position to someone else and they weren't letting them have it back. So Harry was traded in 1910, after this incident, to the

Chicago White Sox. And he finished the season there as a torrid hitter almost hit .300 for the last 40 games of the season. And then he became the captain of the White Sox. And there were newspaper accounts that Harry Lord, the Bates graduate, brainy Harry Lord, might be some day the manager of the Chicago White Sox. But as you alluded to, hard-headed Harry had his problems there. In 1914, he was dissatisfied with his contract. The owner, Charles Comiskey, was notoriously miserly and Harry was griping about that. And he also was griping about his manager, forcing them to take signals that either hit or take.

Bob: And so he kind of walked out of the Chicago White Sox in 1914 and he kind of reemerged on Bates' radar screen after that. In 1914, Bates was having its first alumni parade reunion. And there was a story in the Bates Student saying that Harry Lord, it didn't say Harry Lord Class of '08. It just said, Harry Lord is rumored to be in attendance at this first Alumni Day parade. He had left baseball and so in May of that year, so he had some free time. In the 1915 season, he jumped to this new league, the Federal League, which was a third major league. They were calling it the outlaw league and he was a big name. And he was the player-manager for Buffalo, the Buffalo Blues, and they were called Harry Lords Fighting Federal League team. And there was a Harry Lord day and he was a big league star giving this new league credibility and glamor.

Aaron: It's funny, you mentioned the White Sox going back to them real quick before we get to his, a short coaching career with Bates, but with the White Sox, he was reunited with Mr. Messenger, who is even more mysterious figure. Like, a fair amount is known about Harry Lord a matter of finding it, but this Bobby Messenger went to Bates apparently then played for the White Sox with Harry Lord. I mean, he's even more of a mysterious figure, isn't he?

Bob: This is a guy I really am interested in learning more about because he came to Bates in 1904, played the whole football season. Actually him and Harry Lord at one point were in the backfield. Lord weighed 160, Messenger weighed 148. But Messenger had a bad fumble in one of the games. So they moved them over to end. And back in that era, they didn't pass. 1906, the forward pass became legal and this was 1904. But Messenger did kick the extra points. And also the kickoffs. And back then a touchdown was five points and an extra point kick was one point. So he played the whole football season. He played the first game of baseball against Hebron Academy, had two stolen bases, three hits, I believe. They won big and then boom, the trail goes cold, at Bates. Never again is he in a baseball roster or mentioned anywhere.

Bob: And all of a sudden he emerges, as you point out, in 1909, Charles Walter, whose nickname was Bobby Messenger, played baseball for the Chicago White Sox, from 1909 to 1911. And that was while Harry Lord came to the team in 1910. So Lord and Messenger, who were backfield mates at Bates, might've lived in Parker Hall together, started playing baseball together, played for the Chicago White Sox for a couple seasons. Messenger was not a star. I think he played 57 games over the course of parts of four seasons. And his lifetime average was .172. But, he made it to the big leagues.

Aaron: And then, 1918, Harry Lord returns to Bates after an '05 season, that saw Bates go 3-11, only a few of those games did Harry play in. He returns the Bates as their head coach in 1918, kind of an emergency role. And leads them to a 4-4 record. Obviously, maybe add a little more context to why he returned and the reason behind that kind of a sad reason really. Right.

Bob: Yeah. I mean, in researching Harry Lord's life, there was so many Dickensian twists. Like people that he would meet at one point in his life, early on, they would come back into his life in strange ways. Like Messenger, like we talked about. And his coach, the football coach, Royce Davis Purinton already had mentioned with, he happened to meet him on a boat coming back from Boston and Royce Davis Purinton, Bates class of '00, got him the tryout that launched his major league career. Well Royce Purinton became the athletic director at Bates. So he was the football coach from 1904 to 1917. He was the baseball coach roughly those years, but he also looks to the athletic director. With the start of WWI, Purinton volunteered to be a trainer going to France and training troops under the offices of the YMCA.

Bob: He left his Bates coaching career, volunteered, went to France, trained the troops. At some point he also was on the front lines. When he came back from WWI, he wasn't the same man he was, a man of great vigor. He returned to Bates in 1919, but something had happened to him overseas and he ended up dying within months after his return from WWI. And he was buried. There was all of the campus was in mourning. I mean, he had been the coach and athletic director and baseball coach for close to 20 years and they find, maybe he had tuberculosis, but they didn't test that. He didn't have tuberculosis. But I often found myself wondering, there was a baseball player named Christy Mathewson who also was in WWI.

Bob: And he was exposed to gas in some training exercise. And he returned and never was the same man and died in a sanitarium, which is exact, Royce Davis Purinton died in a sanitarium in Lewiston. I'm not sure if he was exposed to gas, but it is true that he came back from WWI and died very shortly after and in his early forties. But when he was gone for the 1918 season, Bates needed an interim coach. There was a committee and they turned to Harry Lord. So I don't know if Harry Lord was trying to do his old school, like a good turn after leaving them mid-season. And then worse than that, being a Benedict Arnold, playing against them twice for the Portland Pine Tree Association, both games Bates lost. And Harry led off for the other team. But Harry Lord came back to Bates and coached the war-shortened 1918 team to a 4-4 record. And there's a note in the Bates Student that even during the season, at least one player on the baseball team was drafted. So, yeah, Harry Lord returned to Bates.

Aaron: Any other thoughts you want to share about the early days of Bates baseball. Stuff, you're maybe excited to look up even further about some of these turn-of-the-century and by turn of the century I mean 19th and 20th century guys who played for the Bobcats. This program, Bates baseball, it's been around. Some of the oldest programs at Bates 1872, their first game officially we have on record. Some of this stuff might be hard to find, but it seems like there's a lot that could be revealed, I guess, through more research, right?

Bob: The research was so fascinating to see how is his life intersected. One other quick reference. Bates played Holy Cross, who was in football. And they were one of the top teams in the country. And they had a halfback named Bill Carrigan, who was a Lewiston native. Bates played Holy Cross with Bill Carrigan, who ended up again playing on the Boston Red Sox with Harry Lord. And one of these, again, these Dickensian overlaps of life. And Carrigan, he was with the Red Sox for like 10 years, including overlapping with Harry Lord a couple of seasons. He was Babe Ruth's, he was a player manager. They won two world championships under him in 1915 and 1916. And Bill Carrigan returned to Lewiston after his major league career with the Red Sox and ended up coaching Bates

baseball in 1933 and 1934. And he's actually buried in a cemetery in Lewiston, the same cemetery as Royce Davis Purinton the athletic director.

Aaron: You graduated from Bates in 1981. And your sports connection with Bates, you played in the early days of the men's lacrosse team under Web Harrison. I know it's kind of a pivot from baseball, but I did want to get kind of your recollections on those early days of the men's lacrosse team a little bit also.

Bob: In 1979, Bates had just started a lacrosse program. It was the second year. And so Web Harrison, who was the football coach needed to field a team. There were some good lacrosse players on campus, such as Rand Hopkinson, Peter Helm, Tom Johnson. But Web also needed to get more players. So we recruited a lot of good football player athletes like Jeff Melvin, who's class of 82, who had a son named Andrew Melvin, who was a real lacrosse star. But Jeff was a football player. Craig Cummins was a football player. So he recruited some of his good football player athletes to fill the roster.

Bob: But there was a third category. They also needed some warm bodies. So I fit that mold. So he took a few people who had no athletic pedigree. I was one of them, a friend of mine named Paul Hodson was one of them, another guy named Brent Smith, who was actually the captain of his high school football team. And a man who later became a captain in the Marines. He joined the team too and the three of us formed a line that we called the Keystone Middies. We were a just comical and inept. But the ball could wind up anywhere except for the opponent's net. Between having some good football player athletes, and some of the natural lacrosse athletes and the warm bodies just to fill out the roster, Web molded that team, started the Bates lacrosse dynasty.

Aaron: Your recollections of Web as a head coach, because he obviously created the phrase "It's a great day to be a Bobcat", pretty famous line that everyone still says today and everything. What are some maybe Web Harrison stories that you recall?

Bob: You know, he was new to lacrosse, but he was very diligent. And I think he knew to let some of the seasoned lacrosse players, give them a lot of input, but he was in control. And he had a vision I think that Bates lacrosse over time could grow into something. He was the founding father. And now it's, I think one of the most successful sports on the campus. He was an icon.

Aaron: Well, Bob, thank you so much again, really appreciate it. I'm sure people will love this peek back into the kind of early 20th century of Bates baseball and our first big leaguer there, Harry Lord. Thank you so much again for joining us Bobcast. I really appreciate it.

Bob: Thank you for having me, Aaron. Really love the Bates Bobcast.