"COLORED GIANT FOR COKATO"

Please do not be offended at the title of this article. It is not us writing. Notice the quotation marks? This title comes from the headline of a May 13, 1915, Cokato *Enterprise* article, seen below left.

COLORED GIANT FOR COKATO.

Fast First Baseman Signed by Local Management for Season.

The Cokato baseball management todaw signed up one of the best first basemen in Minnesota—Bob Marshall a colored man.

Marshall has played with the Colored Gophers of St. Paul for three seasons, and was with the Chicago Leland Giants two years.

Marshall will play first base for Cokato the rest of the season. With a man of his caliber on the initial sack, Cokato should have one of the fastest infields in this section of the state. He will play in the game Sunday with Waverly on the local grounds.

The "giant" being referenced is Bobby (Bob) Marshall, who by the time he arrived in Cokato was a legend in the Minnesota sports community going back to his days as a student at Minneapolis Central High School.

How town team baseball is played now differs markedly from a century ago. Teams would supplement their local talent with paid players from other communities, sometimes from guite a distance.

With games typically, though not always, played on weekends and holidays, players who came from a distance, like Marshall's motorcycle (being it was 1915, imagine that!) trips from Minneapolis, this was not an impediment to their playing.

Just who was Bob Marshall? The article did not do his career and life, and the significance of his one season in Cokato, much justice.

The April 1 *City Pages* article, "Blackball", described Marshall as "the Bo Jackson of his era". Said author Ryan Whirty: "He [Marshall] broke color barriers and records on the University of Minnesota football team, where he would earn a spot in the College Football Hall of Fame. A true renaissance man, he would become one of the first black players in the NFL, while also running track, boxing, wrestling, and playing hockey — and become a successful lawyer in his spare time."

Six years before his one season in Cokato, Marshall played for the St. Paul Colored Gophers, who barnstormed the state, garnering both positive and negative — and very often virulently racist — coverage. Undeterred, that 1909 team complied a record of 28-5-1.

By the time Marshall played for Cokato, he was thirty-five years old, but still a force in the sports community. One key question we were unfortunately unable to answer — how exactly did a "giant" in the baseball world like Marshall end up in Cokato? That question is a mystery and may likely never be answered.

(continued on page six)

COKATO, 24; HOPKINS, 0.

Local Men Massacre Visitors Sunday

in Old-Time Swatfest.
Hopkins, touted, as one of the fastest amateur teams in the Twin Cities, was completely outclassed Sunday when the team journeyed to Cokato and were thrashed, 24 to 0.

At no time did the visitors stand a ghost of a show, the locals whanging the ball to a fare-ye-well. The visitors didn't make so many errors, as the ball was generally hit where they least expected it, and before the afternoon's battle had been called off, both sides were extremely tired—Hopkins being awearied from chasing the long drives, and Cokato from running the bases so often.

The locals played a good fast game and could easily have run in many more tallies, as they took only one base on long hits in the latter part of the game.

The following box score tells the game as well as anything:

	C	OKATO					
		ab.	r.	h.	po.	a.	
McGrath	ı, 2b	6	2	2	3	2.	0
Kane, c		7	1		8	0	Q.
Baines,	88	3	6	1			0
Marshal	l, 1b	5	4	3	10	0	0
Ferris,	rf	4	3	3	1 2	0	0
Wreisne	r, 3b	6	4	3	2	1	0
Peterson	n, lf	3	3	3	0	ข	0
Juntilla,	cf	3	0	0 .	1	0	0
Schneid	erhan, p	5	1	1	0	4	0
				_	= :	-	
Total	3	42	24	19	27	11	0
	HO	PKIN	S.				
				h.	po	a.	e.
R. Malo	ney, lf	. 4	0		1		0
	ney, 1b		0		6	1	0
Ruth, 3	b	2	0			2	1
Lofgren	ь ; с	. 4	Ô.	0		1	0
Thonka.	ss-2b	4		0		1	1
Smith.	3b-ss	3	0	0		1	0
	cf		0		2.	0	Ō
	nf-p		Ō.	0	2	1	ì
	, p-rf		0	0	ī	Ô	Õ
						300	
Total	s	30	0.	3	24	7	3
Score	by Inni	ngs-					
Calcata		4 1 5	4	0 1	4		24

The Hunt & Poke column of the March 16, 1950 *Enterprise* noted how the 1915 Cokato team had a number of paid players, including Rube Ursela, a former U of M teammate of Marshall's. At the time of his Cokato playing days, Marshall also had a job as a grain inspector for the state of Minnesota, one he would hold until his retirement in 1950. It was that retirement which promoted the Hunt & Poke article, noting that testimonials for Marshall were actively being sought for his retirement party.

There are images of Marshall available at several on-line sources, which show why he was called a "giant". For that time, he cut an imposing figure at just over six feet tall and 180 pounds. Moorhead State University history professor, Stephen Hoffbeck, wrote in the Winter 2004-05 *Minnesota History* magazine that upon Marshall's death in 1958, scant attention as paid to his contributions.

"The newspaper tributes by then were short," wrote Hoffbeck, "devoid of the recognition due to one of the state's greatest athletes, as if the new generation of writers had lost some of the collective Minnesota memory." Marshall is now receiving, in our modern era, the attention he deserves. It does take, sometimes, a longer duration than it should for people to be given the adulation they earned.

We do not have any images of Marshall during his year with the Cokato team, but we do have a neat picture of the west side ball field where he, and many others, entertained the crowds. It was located in a grain field about two blocks southwest of the Cokato school building. Typical of ball fields of its time — calling it a stadium would be amusing — it featured a small grandstand and seating for each team. Spectators would sit on the grass or stand to watch along the base paths and would quite often line their cars up on the far reaches of the outfield.

While Bobby Marshall's life and career intersected for only an oh so brief time here in Cokato, we at the museum want to make sure it is chronicled. Much like the signs that say "Lincoln Slept Here", we can say that, with forthright honesty, "Marshall Played Here".

