

An arena of dreams

by BRIAN LOCKHART

Archibald 'Moonlight' Graham ? Professional major league career stats: New York Yankees. One game.

Played one inning, the ninth, in right field.

Zero at bats.

In the single inning he played in the big pro leagues on June 29, 1905, the ball never even came near him.

After that night, Moonlight Graham returned to his regular team and finished a rather successful baseball career, even if it was in the minors.

Moonlight went on to earn a medical degree and became a local doctor in Chisholm, Minnesota, where he served the population for 50 years.

His nickname 'Moonlight' was quickly forgotten and he was then known as 'Doc' Graham to the inhabitants of Chisholm.

'Go the distance.'

Many people will remember the story of Moonlight Graham from the movie 'Field of Dreams' when Kevin Costner, as Ray Kinsella, builds a baseball diamond in the middle of his Iowa cornfield, much to the chagrin of his neighbors and especially his brother-in-law, who figures he must be crazy.

'If you build it, he will come.'

Moonlight Graham, however, wasn't a character invented by Canadian author W. P. Kinsella, who wrote the original book, Shoeless Joe, that the movie was based on.

Moonlight Graham was a real person, a real ball player, and a real doctor. He died in 1965, 25 years before the movie was made.

W. P. Kinsella noticed his record in the Baseball Encyclopedia and incorporated it into his novel.

Moonlight Graham had the distinction of becoming famous long after he left this world.

I'm not sure why Kinsella chose to make Moonlight Graham part of his fantasy sports novel.

Maybe it was because it tells the story of a man who was able to claim that he played professional baseball for the New York Yankees ? even if it was just for one inning.

Living the dream ? it's something we all desire at one time or another. Even if it is for just one inning in the game of life.

A Zamboni driver got his big moment last week when he suited up at the last minute and played goal for the Carolina Hurricanes of the National Hockey League after both of their regular goalies had to leave the game due to injuries.

David Ayres put on the mask and the pads and took his place between the pipes when the second goalie was injured and the Hurricanes bench had to scramble to find someone who could suit up, get out there, and stop a puck.

The headlines of a Zamboni driver taking over the position seem to imply that he was in the utility room tinkering with the ice machine when someone spotted him and said "You!! Have you ever worn skates? We need you to get out on the ice and play for us!?"

This wasn't quite the same as the Reluctant Astronaut, where Don Knotts, a janitor at NASA becomes an instant celebrity by being launched into space with no training.

Ayres is a former goalie, and has been a practice goalie with the Toronto Marlies.

But that really doesn't matter. An admittedly nervous Ayres said he thought they were joking when he was asked to fill in on the ice in front of 18,000 spectators.

While he is indeed a Zamboni driver, he was also an experienced goalie.

However, at age 42, any ambition he ever had of making the big leagues was long over. A kidney transplant he had 15 years earlier had convinced him he would never had any kind of real career in the sport.

But Ayres took his place on the ice. After letting in two goals on the first two shots, one of his teammates approached and said, "Just relax, this is gonna be fun for you, have a good time with it. We don't care how many goals you let in, let's just have fun."

He stopped the next eight shots.

At the end of the game, the crowd in Toronto gave him a standing ovation.

His short stint on the ice led to appearances on TV talk shows and admiration from a lot of people who had his back and rooted for him when he put on the skates and stepped up for a challenge.

While his 15 minutes of fame will fade and eventually become one of those "do you remember when" moments, at least he had that moment.

Moonlight Graham's one inning on the diamond may have created a field of dreams, but in Ayres' case, it was an arena of dreams.