

How Lismore came to save Twins, take them to World Series win

WORTHINGTON — "I Have a Dream."

I am not thinking of Martin L. King Jr. I am thinking of that good old song by Abba:

"I have a dream, a fantasy
"To help me through reality..."

Dreams come to me when the major league baseball clubs go into their spring camps.

In one version of a dream, Bill Gates buys Windom for his hometown and announces he will build a stadium on the east side of the city. Next he buys the Twins and lays apart \$7 billion to build the team. He brings back Eric Milton and Eddie Guardado and LaTroy Hawkins. He builds a commuter line to bring Twin Cities fans to the ballpark.



Ray Crippen

In another version of the dream, each ballclub is allowed to recall one of its deceased stars. George Steinbrenner and Joe Torre argue about Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. They decide on Gehrig. Boston gets Babe Ruth.

The White Sox absolve Shoeless Joe and call him back. The Tigers go for Ty Cobb. (I was reading a transportation story lately. It said when the Tigers signed Ty Cobb, he got on a train at his hometown, Royston, Ga. It took three days on the train for Ty to get to Detroit.)

The Twins? Well, in my dream the Twins go to Lismore and sign John R. Donaldson. Now, what follows is not a dream. This is true.

The Lismore Gophers signed John Donaldson for the 1926 season for \$450 a month. John took a house on First Street and lived there with his wife and his young nephew, Clifton Watson.

John was a big man: six-foot-three, 175 pounds. He batted left for Lismore. Although he had but two home runs, that is pretty fair for a pitcher, and pitching was John Donaldson's assignment. He pitched 25 complete games; existing records show 295 strikeouts in 246 innings.

Lismore played Doc Juel's legendary team from Ellsworth seven times that summer and won the series 4-3. In one game, with John Donaldson pitching against Ellsworth's Smokey Joe Lutz, the contest stretched through 12 innings. Donaldson had 18 strikeouts. Lismore won 6-3.

The '26 Lismore team took on everybody. Spencer, Fulda, Arnolds Park, Edgerton. On July 14, they played at White, S.D. and smashed Pipestone's Black Sox, 16-0. The Black Sox are another area baseball legend, an all-colored team.

For the Fourth of July, Lismore went to Fairmont to play Gilkerson's Union Giants out of Chicago. The Gophers lost that one 6-1, but they played for a crowd of 5,000. They also lost to the House of David, 2-1, in a game at Alexandria.

John Donaldson began his career at first base in 1912 with the All Nations team. All Nations was a barnstorming team and there never was another like it — U.S. whites and blacks, Cubans, Indians, Canadians. The All Nations went to Sioux Falls in August 1912, and John Donaldson won his debut performance in the local region; 2-0, with 14 strikeouts. The next game he went 13 innings with 23 strikeouts and another 2-0 win.

John threw a notable curve ball and he had a fast ball. In addition, he was a man of goodwill. Newspaper reports said it was John's personality that was making him a hit with the baseball crowds of Sioux Falls, northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota.

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In 1916, Donaldson pitched his All Nations club to the Negro League Championship, defeating both the Chicago American Giants and the Indianapolis ABCs. In that day, many believed John Donaldson was the greatest pitcher in baseball.

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The Donaldsons were part of the Lismore social scene. The *Lismore Leader* reported in August the nephew, Clifton Watson, "was honored at a farewell party last Friday afternoon at the John Donaldson home when a number of his friends pleasantly surprised him. The merry-makers enjoyed an afternoon of fun after which light refreshments were served."

Anyway — John Donaldson was about the best ball player our region ever knew.

In my dreams, he pitches for the Twins.

Ray Crippen is a former editor of the Daily Globe. His column appears on Saturdays.