

APOCRYPHA: TRADITIONS, MYTHS, & LEGENDS

Ninth-Inning Conviction



The Reed baseball team of '39 faced a ruthless foe at the state penitentiary

By Will Swarts '92

Baseball has no clock, but some games feel like eternal punishment, even when your opponents are serving life.

The Reed Cardinals (as they were then) never forgot the game they played on April 22, 1939, inside the grim, gray walls of the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem.

First baseman **Gregg Wood '39**, now a retired physician in Lake Oswego, remembers that the game began with a promising start. Third baseman **Randy Gore '39** led off with a homer.

“You could hear the cons saying things like, ‘I’ll bet ya half a pack of butts on the visitors,’” Gregg says.

The Cardinals’ optimism soon faded. As the game progressed, the Reed squad was alarmed to discover that the convict team included several expert players, including a hulking, masterful right-handed pitcher.

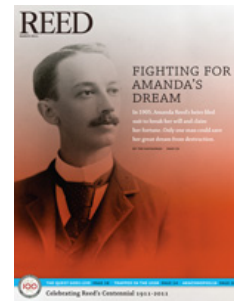
Gregg can still remember being baffled at the plate. “We had ’em 1–0, but they had a player—Luke Crosswhite,” he recalls. “He just slaughtered us pitching. He was really terrific.”

In fact, inmate pitcher Keith “Big Luke” Crosswhite was an extraordinary athlete who would lead the OSP team to several victories over professional teams in the next few years. (See sidebar.)

Reed surrendered four runs in the third inning, and another three in the fourth. The Cardinals “put up a game fight,” according to the *Quest*, notching seven hits,



MEMENTO: A baseball signed by the 1939 Reed Cardinals remains a prized possession of the Kronenberg family. Signatures include those of Al Kronenberg '41, Dick Irwin '42, Randy Gore '39, Robert Scholz '40, Gregg Wood '39, Curt Martin '40 Bill Martin '41, Jack Kvernlund '40, Art Carson '40, and Norm Petigrow '41.



EDITOR'S NOTE

- [From the Centennial Committee](#)

FEATURES

- [Fighting for Amanda's Dream](#)
- [Webmaster](#)
- [Rapture of the Tiny](#)
- [Trapped in the USSR](#)
- [A School for Kathmandu](#)
- [Puja's Lesson](#)
- [What Hum 110 Is All About](#)
- [Young Alumni give a Damn](#)
- [100 Years of Reed](#)

ALUMNI PROFILES

- [Librarian takes Alaska town by Storm: Ruth Wetterborg Sandvik '38](#)
- [Smashing Atoms—and Stereotypes: Beverly Karplus Hartline '71](#)
- [Can the Humanities Save the U.S. Economy?: Eduardo Ochoa '73](#)
- [Bringing the Dead to Life : Melinda Hunt '81](#)
- [Tequila Evangelist: Clayton Szczech '00](#)

ELIOT CIRCULAR

- [The Grandmaster Returns](#)
- [The Book Unbound](#)
- [The Quest Goes Live](#)
- [Bowled Over](#)

EMPIRE OF THE GRIFFIN

- [Notes on Camp Westwind](#)
- [Zombies take Chicago](#)
- [Getting French in D.C.](#)
- [The Rarest Gift](#)

REEDIANA

- [Mark Bitterman '95: Salted](#)
- [Juliane L. Fry: Encyclopedia of Weather and Climate Change](#)
- [Jeff Goldsmith '70: The Sorcerer's Apprentice](#)
- [Reediana Briefs](#)

Search Reed magazine 🔍

LATEST COMMENTS

- [steve-jobs-1976](#) I knew Steve Jobs when he was on the second floor of Quincy. (Fall... [Utnapishtim](#) - 2 weeks ago
- [Prof. Mason Drukman \[political science 1964–70\]](#) This is gold, pure gold. God bless, Prof. Drukman. [puredog](#) - 1 month ago
- [virginia-davis-1965](#) Such a good friend & patriot in the day of Satyricon... [czarchasm](#) - 4 months ago
- [John Peara Baba 1990](#) John died of a broken heart from losing his mom and then his... [kodachrome](#) - 7 months ago
- [Carol Sawyer 1962](#) Who wrote this obit? I'm writing something about Carol Sawyer... [MsLaurie Pepper](#) - 8 months ago
- [William W. Wissman MAT 1969](#) ...and THREE sisters. Sabra, the oldest, Mary, the middle, and... [riclf](#) - 10 months ago

In honor of Reed's 100th birthday, [make your gift](#) this year and pledge your continued support in the future.



REED MAGAZINE STAFF

EDITOR
Chris Lydgate '90
503/777-7596

CLASS NOTES EDITOR
Laurie Lindquist
503/777-7591

WEB DESIGNER
Tom Humphrey
503/459-4632

ALUMNI NEWS EDITOR
Robin Tovey '97

including Randy's dinger and hits by Gregg and Robert Scholz '40. But the "impotent Reed attack" went nowhere, and the final score was a 10–1 pounding.

The *Quest* headline was unsparing: "Reed Trounced by Prison Team."

Pitcher **Al Kronenberg '41** never forgot the game, reminiscing about it whenever he drove past the penitentiary. "There's the slammer,' my dad would always say," recalls his daughter, Janet Hill, adding that Al would describe the sound of the main doors closing behind the Reed nine that day in 1939.

The sound may have still been echoing in Al's mind as he stood on the pitcher's mound. Prison warden George Alexander indirectly weighed in on Reed's pitching in an irate note he wrote a couple of weeks later to a sporting goods supplier: "I wish to enter a complaint regarding the quality of the bats, which we have been purchasing from you during the past two months. Out of the number we have bought, 15 of them have broke, which would indicate they are not of very strong material." Perhaps they couldn't hold up to so many fat pitches and big swings.

In fairness, the Reed squad didn't benefit from very intensive training. The legendary **Charles S. Botsford** [director of physical education, 1912–52] encouraged students to play for the love of the game. He named skillful players as "masters," and they often ran the teams. "The idea was that we didn't have a paid coach, and we selected players to be the next year's coach," says **Dick Irwin '42**, now retired as chief of the U.S. Census and living in Alexandria, Virginia.

Botsford's philosophy was extolled in affectionate eulogies after his death in 1967. "Physical activity, games, and sports, Bots believed, are for personal fulfillment, for mental as well as physical health, for enjoyment, for fellowship, and for life after college days are over," read one.

"Star athletes had his admiration and blessing and he appointed them as 'masters' to teach others," said **Byron Youtz** [acting president, 1967–68; physics, 1956–68]. "But he was devoted to the inept, the uncoordinated, the timid, and the duffer, whom he led to the threshold where skill lay and where the pleasure and excitement of achievement came."

The Cardinals' record that year was an undistinguished 4–13, although they managed to finish the season with a thumping 8–3 victory over Pacific College (now George Fox University).

"We didn't win a lot of games," Dick says. "We weren't very good, but we had a lot of fun playing."

But the subsequent careers and lives of the 1939 Cardinals are an eloquent testament to the wisdom of Botsford's approach. Sure, they got pasted by the inmates, but the camaraderie they developed—and their love of the game—sustained them through their time at Reed, during World War II, and beyond. Indeed, many of them became lifelong friends.

Al Kronenberg served with the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific, then became an executive with Weyerhaeuser. His career took him and his family to Hong Kong, Singapore, and Indonesia. Throughout his life, his varsity letter *R* remained one of his prized possessions. "Baseball was a huge part of his life," says his daughter Janet.

Al's widow, Anne, said his Reed friendships formed a social core. "The wonderful thing about the teammates was that they stayed friends forever," she says.

At a memorial for **Bill Martin '41**, Al recounted a bit of sibling rivalry and athletic folly. “[Bill] played left field in baseball, and his brother Curt played shortstop,” Al wrote. “An opponent hit a harmless fly, both called for it, both were stubborn, and they ran into each other. The ball dropped on the ground between them and they started a fistfight. By the time another player got the ball, the batter was on third.”

“That group of men was so neat,” Janet says. “Nobody came from great wealth, but all those guys from Reed went out and did really great things.”

Just not on a baseball field.

THE CON AND THE CURVEBALL

Keith Crosswhite was just 19 years old when he went on a cross-country crime spree that ended in disaster on October 18, 1931.

Crosswhite and an older friend, John Owen, 28, were driving through LaGrande, Oregon, when Oregon State Policeman Amos “Spud” Helms stopped their car, suspecting it was linked to a stick-up robbery in Idaho Falls. Owen shot Helms in the hand and abdomen, a wound that eventually killed him. The two fled into the mountains and were found two days later by a posse. Owen and Crosswhite stayed mum on who pulled the trigger and were sentenced to life. Crosswhite served 12 years before Owen confessed.

“My brother was with the wrong person,” says his sister, Nell Crosswhite Jersak. After Keith’s arrest, their father—who was, ironically, a sheriff’s deputy in Springfield, Missouri—was himself killed in a shootout and died before he could plead for leniency at his son’s sentencing.

In the penitentiary, Keith Crosswhite picked up the nickname “Big Luke.”

“He became an outstanding athlete in prison,” says his brother Joe Crosswhite, a retired mathematics professor.

Crosswhite won a gold watch at a prison track meet in July 1940. (The *Eugene Register-Guard* said the convict “was more interested in months and years than minutes and hours.”)

After beating college and semi-pro teams, Crosswhite faced more serious competition. In 1942, he racked up four wins against the Salem Senators, a professional team in the Class B Western International League, close to today’s single-A level. The Senators offered him a contract.

The warden was willing to let Crosswhite sign, so long as he only pitched home games, but the plan was quashed by national minor league commissioner judge W.G. Branham.

Crosswhite was paroled in 1943, after Owen’s confession. The Seattle Rainiers looked at him, but were barred from signing the ex-con. Crosswhite returned to Springfield and remained a formidable semipro pitcher. He raised a family and lived quietly until his death in 1997. According to his brother, Joe, his ban from professional baseball was “one of the great disappointments of his life.”

—*Author info: Will Swarts '92 is a writer in New York. Old rugby teammates will quickly point to him as a prime example of Reed's tradition of enthusiastic but unskilled athletes.*

comments powered by Disqus

[REED COLLEGE HOMEPAGE](#)

[COME TO REUNIONS!](#)

[ABOUT REED MAGAZINE](#)

[REED ALUMNI HOMEPAGE](#)

[GOT NEWS? SUBMIT A CLASS NOTE](#)

[UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS](#)