

Dyersville, Iowa, is baseball heaven for the Clarkes.



GENERATIONS

For the Love of the Game

We swung for the fences to play on the Field of Dreams.

BY JEFFREY WRIGHT Murphysboro, Illinois

The doldrums of the off-season were broken suddenly on November 24, 2015, when the Murphysboro Clarkes received an invitation from Matt “Scoops” Lurk of the St. Louis Unions to join six vintage baseball teams at the Field of Dreams in Dyersville, Iowa. This news quickly spread among the team.

Within a few short days, the Clarkes announced, “We’re in!” and we marked the dates August 5-7, 2016, on the calendar.

The Clarkes have played vintage “base ball” (the old spelling) since our inaugural match on May 21, 2005. Vintage baseball honors and respects our country’s favorite pastime, conducting matches according to the highest standards

of sportsmanship, gentlemanly behavior, courtesy and respect for other people.

The ball is slightly bigger and heavier than a modern baseball. Players dress in old-time uniforms and do not wear gloves. And every player (*ballist*, we say) has a nickname that is either self-proclaimed or designated by a teammate, like Dawg, Black Bart, Legs, Icy Hot, Junior, One Leg, Chief, Train, Bags, Wrongway, Old Man, Spike, Fast Action and Splat.

The rules are slightly different, too. Fair or foul is determined by where the ball first lands. A batter is out if the baseball is caught on one bounce. Base runners can’t overrun first base but must stop on the bag. And swearing, wagering, spitting and scratching are not



Fog made night games seem even more magical.

allowed. Violators are subject to a 25-cent fine, equivalent to a day’s wages in the 1860s.

Spring of 2016 brought another trip back in time to honor history and community pride. The season’s schedule included matches with the Brown Stockings, Perfectos, Unions and the Lafayette Square Cyclone from Missouri; Belleville Stags, Vandalia Old Capitals, Breese

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Players emerge from the towering corn stalks at the Field of Dreams. Below: Dawg pitches.



Shoal Creek Farmers, Vermillion Voles, Springfield Long Nine and Chicago Salmon from Illinois; and the Hog and Hominy Picked Nine from Tennessee.

The season progressed with trips to Emmenegger Nature Park and Jefferson Barracks Park in St. Louis and matches at our hometown venue, Longfellow Park.

When the much-anticipated first weekend in August finally arrived, a caravan of Clarkes and our families departed southern Illinois with grand dreams of what would greet us in Iowa.

The 6½-hour trip seemed to take no time at all, as we were on our way to hallowed baseball ground. As our vehicle approached Dyersville, my heart raced with anticipation. Dark green corn as far as the eye could see bordered the last three miles of our journey. When we arrived, we were overcome with the aura of baseball history and all that is good about the sport.

Shoelless Joe, the book by W. P. Kinsella, and the movie *Field of Dreams* came to life on this grand

weekend. For three days, all was right in our world as the Clarkes, Unions, Perfectos, Cyclone, Brown Stockings, Stags and Voles played out a tournament connecting the past and present. Our camaraderie displayed the genuine spirit of vintage baseball.

The weekend we took the field at this special place was another illustration for the Clarkes that baseball is hands-down the best game in town. The Field of Dreams in Dyersville exceeded our high expectations and unequivocally displayed why it is rightfully known as baseball heaven.

There, a bright blue sky, neatly manicured grass, endless rows of magnificent corn and beautiful weather combined to create the perfect setting.

Evening games were accentuated by a magical fog that settled across the outfield, calling attention to the sense of inspiration that hung in the Iowa air.

And in it, I reflected back on the resplendent days of my youth, spending quality time with my dad learning to play ball. ⚾



Head to the Ballpark!

The Murphysboro Clarkes go back to the Field of Dreams in **Dyersville, Iowa, Sept. 15-17** for another weekend of vintage baseball games, open to the public. Admission is free. Go to fieldofdreamsmoviesite.com.

The regular playing season extends from **March through Oct.** on their home field at Longfellow Park, North 20th Street between Wall and Logan streets, in Murphysboro, Illinois.

The **St. Louis Cup, July 29**, at historic Forest Park in St. Louis, Missouri, is another schedule highlight. For more information, visit [facebook.com/murphysboroclarques](https://www.facebook.com/murphysboroclarques).