



## William James Class of 2012

William Lawrence James was born on March 12, 1892 in Iowa Hill, Placer County, CA. Baseball claimed his attention very early in his life when he was water boy for the Iowa Dusty Hill Roads and then played on a team called the Wide Awakes with his brother and sister.

He came to Oroville at age eleven, finished elementary school, and graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1910. While at OHS, he was very active in sports, and lettered in basketball and baseball. A teammate, Chester Nisbet, became a life-long friend and married Bill's sister, Irene. In the fall of 1911, Bill entered St. Mary's College in Moraga, but his stay there was short as West Coast baseball clubs took notice of him and began knocking on his door. His baseball life began in 1912 when he was signed by the Seattle Giants where he became a "blazing" fast ball pitcher and a fan favorite star known as "Seattle Bill."

Just a year later, Bill, at age 22, was approached by the National League (NL) Boston Braves, signed a contract and thus became the first ever major league baseball player from Oroville! 1913 saw the Braves finishing 5th in the NL and Bill compiling a 6-10 win loss record.

In 1914, the Braves came alive and advanced to the World Series. Bill won 26 games that year and lost only 7, posting the best record in Major League Baseball (MLB). His Earned Run Average (ERA) of 1.90 was the MLB best and at one point in the season he won 16 consecutive games. He also led the NL in with a winning percentage of .788.

Bill pitched a shutout in his first start on the mound and two hitless innings in relief in game two and the Braves were 2-0. They went on to win the Series 4-0 and from then on were known as "The Miracle Team." as they were the first team ever to win a World Series in a four game sweep. MLB history was made and Bill James was a big part of it!

In 1915, with little rest, injuries began to take their toll on Bill, and following two unsuccessful surgeries on his right arm, he was sent to the minors. In 1916, at age 24, he was placed on the voluntary retired list as having a "dead arm."

World War One then interrupted his life and Bill served at the Presidio in San Francisco where he was a bomb throwing instructor in the 66th infantry. He served until the war ended, receiving his honorable discharge in 1918.

He returned to the Braves in 1919, but his arm was never the same. His lifetime MLB pitching record was 37-21. Later in 1919, Bill returned to Oroville to work on a dredge with his dad, then was in the fuel business with Hoke Fuel Company, and also served as Butte County Assessor. He also managed to stay connected with baseball by doing some pitching and coaching with the Sacramento Solons of the Pacific Coast League, and the Chico Colts, and Oroville Olives of the Sacramento Valley League.

During his years in Oroville, Bill devoted his time to giving the youth in town the benefit of his knowledge of the game that made him famous. In 1949, he was named Athlete of the Year for the Helms Foundation. He was inducted into the LaSalle Club Old Timers Club in Sacramento in 1964, and in 1970, he and Gary Nolan were honored at the Max Baer Heart Fund Sports Night in Oroville. Each had brought fame to his hometown fifty-six years apart. A tree is planted in James' memory at the Gary Nolan Sports Complex.

In 1965, the City of Oroville officially recognized Bill with a proclamation for "Outstanding contribution to the world of sports which has added to the prestige of the City of Oroville and has served as an inspiration to its youth for more than fifty years."

Bill James passed away on March 12, 1971 and his funeral was held two years later on his 79th birthday. His pall bearers were Oroville Olives' baseball players and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" was played in his honor.

Please refer to the Butte County Historical Society's DIGGIN'S magazine, Spring Edition 2003 for an in-depth biography on Bill, written by his daughter Janet Holden.