Wheezer Dell

One of Brooklyn's Great Squad of Winning Pitchers

Wheezer Dell — his fellow players saddled him with this euphonious name—is six feet, four inches tall and weighs two hundred pounds. He isn't the handsomest man in the world, but the Brooklyn management don't care about good looks. The only thing that appeals to them is ability to play ball, and in his own profession, that of pitcher, Dell is one of the finds of the year.

At the beginning of this season fans who braved the inclement weather and foregathered at Ebbet's Field were regaled with the view of a long, lanky, awkward-appearing pitcher with a broken nose, a shambling gait, and a sad, dour expression on his sloping features. They watched him curiously, as if wondering where Robbie had dug up that prehistoric looking object, and perhaps idly commenting on his taste in so doing. But their caustic remarks evaporated in Oh's and Ah's of wonder when they beheld that sinuous, uncouth form swaying unsteadily in the pitcher's box suddenly shoot out a long whip cord arm and release as from a gigantic spring a whizzing baseball that whirred as it shot through the air and transfixed the home plate with a quivering thud in the catcher's mit. And the players who ambled forward good-humoredly to take a fall out of the giant changed their attitude from amused complacency to a growing respect for that formidable speed.

"God formed pitchers after a strange pattern," said a well-known baseball sage not long ago, "and the devil formed the umpires." Of the latter view we can give no opinion, though it seems to be the prevailing impression among the players themselves. But of the former there is visible evidence on almost every diamond, for the longest, lankiest, most uncouth members of the players' clan are almost without exception pitchers.
In this respect Dell is no exception. Six feet four inches in height, lank of limb, with tremendously elongated arms, he weighs over two hundred pounds of bone and muscle. When he was a boy he fell off a shed and broke his nose. This accident doubtless didn't improve his looks, but it didn't injure the strength of his arm or impair his pitching skill, so it's a safe bet the early accident won't retard in the least the baseball career which seems to be opening up very brightly before this new Ebbets addition.

There used to be a time when the Brooklyn pitching staff consisted of Nap Rucker. Rucker is still at large and in place of the speed he once used to so much advantage he now employs a baffling slow ball. But Rucker isn't any longer the whole pitching staff. There are Douglass and Smith and Jack Coombs and Appleton and Pfeffer. In addition, there is Dell.

There are those who claim that Robinson isn't a great manager and perhaps he isn't. But he is a great developer of pitching talent. What he did for McGraw is reflected in the pennants of that club, and his loss is sorely felt in the shattered Giant twirling staff to-day. But New York's loss is Brooklyn's gain. In the pitching list given above only Rucker and Coombs are veterans. The rest are pitchers who owe their present great showing partly at least to the efficient coaching of the manager.

Last year the winning spurt of Boston was the feature of July. This year it is the winning spurt of Brooklyn. Perhaps it won't last, but, whether it does or not, the Brooklyn club has once more shown that it has tremendous power any time it can get itself fairly going.

Among the best games pitched at Ebbets field this year have been those by Dell. A twirler of tremendous speed, good curve and effective delivery, he has shown himself to be a genuine find. And his immense strength and endurance make him a most valuable man for the club.

William Dell was born at Tuscarora, Nevada, twenty-eight years ago. The state of mountains, alkali deserts and mines offered few advantages, and when the youthful William was three years old the elder Dell moved on to fresh pastures at Butte, Montana. Here William grew up until he was fifteen years old, at which time, considering himself an able bodied man, he left home and shifted thereafter for himself. After a number of interesting experiences he learned the trade of electrician and worked for several years at various cities in the West, principally in the copper mines of Montana. But the calling of an electrician was precarious, in some cases even dangerous, and Dell, like all ambitious people, was on the lookout for ways to improve himself.

Since he had always been a good deal of an athlete, with his tremendous strength and bulk, it was natural that he should fall in line in the baseball contests that were staged in the mining country. With his build it was also a foregone conclusion that he would pitch.

Dell's baseball career was rather broken, though for some years he has made the bulk of his living in a uniform. His first engagement for money was with the Northwestern League, in 1908. His lines were cast with the Vancouver club. He did pretty good work here, but his next season proved unfortunate. He joined the Union Association, which started off well, but blew up about the Fourth of July, leaving Dell out in the cold. He was unable to land another baseball job, but he fell back upon his trade for the rest of the season and the ensuing winter.

In 1910 he again donned a baseball uniform, this time with Edmonton, in northwest Canada. He did very well here, so well that St. Louis, of the National League, decided to give him a trial and signed him in the fall of 1910. But Dell in his varied wanderings through the great West had committed the unpardonable sin. He had played ball with outlaw circuits and the National Commission would not reinstate him. He was debarred from play during the entire season of 1911.

In 1912, however, the ban was removed and Dell was reinstated with St. Louis. He stayed here working under Bresnahan until about June 1st, when Roger decided that he needed a little more seasoning and sent him to his home in Butte to get it. In 1913, St. Louis
again flirted with the lanky pitcher and his re-entry into the majors seemed assured, when the fickle winds of baseball fortune veered once more and he was sold to Seattle on the Pacific coast. Here he remained until he was sold to Brooklyn last fall and finally permitted to make a real beginning in the major leagues.

In his two years' trial at Seattle, Dell had showed a great aptitude for hard work, fairly steady and consistent ability, with a trend toward wildness. In both years he took part in no less than forty-three games, and was one of the leading pitchers in the league. With Brooklyn, as we go to press, Dell has won 9 and lost 6 games. His early tendency to wildness has been largely curbed, and he bids fair to prove one of the most valuable pitchers of the season.

"In some ways pitching is harder in the majors than it is in the minors," says Dell. "The batters you have to face can hit a good deal better, but on the other hand you have much better parks to work in, and much better support. So I don't know as it seems any harder to
win in Brooklyn than it used to seem in Seattle.

"I like baseball first rate; like it as a sport; like it as a profession. You can make a good deal more money in baseball than you can as an electrician, at least I can. But in order to succeed you have to work hard in baseball as well as anywhere else.

"I am always in condition, for I always work hard in the winters as well as the summers. In wandering around the West I have done almost everything except do the thing that most Eastern people think of first, and that is, be a cow puncher. The great herds of cattle passed in the early '80s and the cowboy business has been dead ever since. The West isn't range land any more; it is cut up into farms. Jess Willard claims to be a cowboy, but I don't know where he worked at the trade. It must have been in his mind's eye."

Among his fellow players Dell goes by the euphonious name of Wheezer. Originally, they called him Whizzer on account of his great speed, but the players couldn't resist the temptation to remodel the name on more commonplace lines.

"Wheezer" is married and makes his winter home in Butte, Montana. He doesn't know exactly whether or not he will come to live permanently in Brooklyn. Something of his indecision depends upon his future showing, but if that showing is anywhere nearly as good as it has been, Dell will be welcome to make his home anywhere he pleases.

Outside of work and baseball Dell likes hunting best. He is rather a reticent, non-committal person and one is naturally guarded in his speech in conversing with a six-foot four-inch giant with a seven-foot reach. We don't know what kind of game he is in the habit of hunting, but if it is anything smaller than grizzly bears there is surplus energy going to waste somewhere in his system.