Cannibals and Sports: The Texas League comes to Longview and Tyler, Texas, 1932

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From 1900 until the Great Depression in the 1930s, minor league baseball experienced steady growth in the numbers of leagues and teams in the United States. The only exception to the ongoing prosperity of minor league baseball came as a result of the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914. On the eve of the United States’ entry into the war, the minor league establishment in 1916 consisted of 181 teams in twenty-five leagues. When the United States threw its might into the European struggle in 1917 and mobilized manpower on a massive scale, many of the minor leagues suspended operations. By 1919 the number of minor leagues dwindled to only ten, the fewest in the twentieth century except for 1943 when World War II again reduced the number of minor leagues to ten. Once the war ended in 1918, Americans gradually returned to normal pursuits and minor league baseball also recovered. By 1921, twenty-six minor leagues fielded teams.

The Texas League did not curtail play during World War I, but it did not fare well. Many of the prime ball players were in the armed forces, Americans had other preoccupations, and most Texas League teams’ attendance ebbed during the short American experience in the bloody conclusion of World War I. As a renaissance in minor league baseball occurred in postwar America, the Texas League also prospered. By 1926, the league drew a record 1,159,905 patrons to its games. Then, rather inexplicably, attendance declined slightly in 1927 and 1928. Experts attributed the losses in attendance to a variety of causes. George White, sports writer for The Dallas Morning News, wrote in his widely read column that some of the Texas League owners were convinced that “... the shrinking attendance of the last few years is directly attributable to the radio’s influence.” Many Americans undoubtedly preferred to stay home and listen to the novel and inexpensive entertainment radios brought directly into their homes rather than attend ball games. Others argued that the declining attendance at baseball games resulted from American boys losing interest in baseball. American boys, so the argument ran, now were more interested in basketball, track, golf, tennis, and other activities than baseball. Another factor which clearly competed for the fans’ entertainment dollars was the growth of family ownership of automobiles and the ever-increasing miles of paved roads in America. Driving trips to visit friends and relatives drew families on weekend outings away from ball parks. In the 1920s municipalities began expensive programs of lighting parks, tennis courts, swimming pools, and other facilities, which also drew potential fans’ attention away from the ballparks. In minor league towns, baseball had once been the main form of entertainment in the summer; now all manner of diversions beckoned and attendance at the ball parks declined.

Until 1930, all Texas League games were played in the afternoon sun, and ball parks in Texas or Louisiana (Shreveport was one of the bulwarks of the

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circuit) were hot places to spend an afternoon in the dog days of summer, even for Southerners who were more or less acclimatized to the heat. All Texas League parks had pavilions to shield their patrons from the searing sun, but even so, an August afternoon in a shaded seat was often uncomfortably warm. In 1930, in Shreveport, Louisiana, the Texas League's Shreveport Sports faced a new competitor for the fans' weekend entertainment dollars: the Publix Theatre Corporation, which operated the Strand Theatre, announced the installation of a refrigerated air conditioning system. Other of the larger cities in the Texas League also witnessed the advent of air-conditioned movie houses, and on hot afternoons in the depths of summer, many of baseball's less dedicated patrons elected to view a film in the cool darkness of a theatre rather than swelter at the ball park, especially if the local heroes were not doing well in the league standings. As the 1920s waned, professional baseball faced a myriad of challenges, and the attendance figures showed that Americans were spending their entertainment dollars on new pursuits. Gate receipts to Texas League games, as was the case for minor league games nation-wide, declined alarmingly as the 1920s came to an end.

As the number of customers declined in the years after the record mark in 1926, Texas League entrepreneurs struggled to find ways to entice fans to their parks. Owners improved their facilities, engaged in promotions to attract fans to the games, and waged more aggressive sales campaigns to lure spectators to their parks. In 1927 and 1928, attendance at Texas League games declined by about eight percent each year. In 1928, Texas League President J. Doak Roberts and the franchise owners launched a determined effort to become more competitive, and in 1929 the league's attendance declined by less than one percent. Many of the owners were relieved by the near reversal of the decline, but the more prescient among them knew that additional innovations were necessary for minor baseball to return to the healthier days of the mid-1920s.

While the full impact of the great crash on Wall Street remained unclear as spring training began in 1930, owners fully understood that 1930 loomed as a critical year in the ongoing battle to improve attendance figures. Four of the Texas League teams installed lights in 1930 and began to play evening baseball to attract more patrons. Each of the teams that turned to night baseball did improve home attendance, but overall the league's attendance declined dramatically in 1930. The impact of the Great Depression became painfully apparent that season: attendance dropped to 690,874. In 1933 the league attracted only 522,512 fans to games, roughly one-half the total attendance in 1926. In spite of efforts to light parks for night ball, to use a split season format with the first half winner and the second half winner (or runner-up) going into post-season playoffs, and other devices to sustain the fans' interest, the Depression simply overwhelmed all the measures the owners developed to combat falling gate receipts in some of the league's more lightly populated locales. Lean times at the box office stalked several of the teams in the Texas League, and dire consequences seemed imminent.

Two Texas League teams, Waco and Wichita Falls, suffered heaviest from
declining attendance. The Waco Cubs had a unique status; they were operated by a corporation owned by the City of Waco, and when the monetary liabilities of operating a team outweighed civic pride, the Cubs dropped out of the league. In 1931, the Cubs were replaced by the Galveston Buccaneers, who immediately drew about fifty percent more attendance than Waco had managed to attract in 1930. Attendance for the entire league in 1931 rose to 768,064, an increase of more than ten percent compared to 1930. It appeared that the eight-team Texas League was in improved condition, but the overall figures for the Texas League were misleading. Total attendance was on the rise in 1931, but some of the franchises located in the league’s smaller cities did not share in the prosperity. The Wichita Fall Spudders faced an alarming decline in gate receipts. In 1927, 1929, and 1930 the Spudders won the league pennant but attendance declined from a club record of 131,385 in 1927 to 74,994 in 1929 and to a dismal 33,560 in 1931, when the team finished fifth in the league standings. Knowledgeable fans realized that in spite of improved aggregate attendance at Texas League parks, the Spudders were close to collapse.

Economic conditions in Wichita Falls were grim. Not only had the Depression had its effect on Wichita Falls, oil production, the linchpin of the area’s economy, drastically declined early in the 1930s. In 1924, for example, total annual oil production in Wichita County reached 15,820,820 barrels; by 1931, annual production dropped to just under 7,000,000 barrels. Nearby Wilbarger County’s oil production had fallen by nearly one half since 1930, and surrounding oil producing areas also reflected similar declines. Wichita Falls, at 43,690 people in the census for 1930, had the smallest population base of all of the cities in the Texas League, and as jobs steadily disappeared, minor league baseball in Wichita Falls faced a crisis.

The management of the Wichita Fall Spudders carefully prepared for the 1932 season. L.C. McEvoy, the club’s president, labored diligently to assemble a competitive team. The Spudders were affiliated with the St. Louis Browns of the American League, and McEvoy and the Browns’ president, Philip Ball, assigned a balanced roster to Wichita Falls which they hoped would restore the team to its competitive level of a few years before. In addition to obtaining carefully selected players for the Spudders’ roster, the Brown’s management inaugurated a publicity campaign to attract a large crowd for the home opener on April 15, 1932, to create an enthusiasm for the team among local fans. The effort of the Spudders’ front office turned out a good crowd of 4,825 fans to Athletic Park to see Wichita Falls demolish the Shreveport Sports by a score of 13-3.

An attendance of nearly 5,000 fans for a game was encouraging, but the Spudders’ management realized that one game did not solve the decline in attendance. By May 8, 1932, the Spudders had played sixteen home dates and had attracted 9,300 admissions. After the opening day success, the home games averaged 298 paid admissions per game. At that rate, the Spudders could expect a season attendance of less than 27,000, a new low for the club. The team was in fourth place, about four and one-half games behind Houston.
and Beaumont which were tied for first place, and as the team floundered on the field and at the ticket office, rumors circulated that the Spudders planned to move from Wichita Falls. On May 19, 1932, while the team was in Houston for a series with the Buffaloes, Al Parker, chief sports writer for the *Wichita Daily News*, announced in his column that the team would relocate in Longview, Texas, one of the centers of the East Texas oil boom that had just begun. According to Parker’s account, the Spudders were scheduled to begin play in Longview on May 25 in a homestand against Fort Worth. The only ray of hope Parker offered his readers was that the move might be temporary. Parker’s report quoted the club president L.C. McEvoy:

> We have no intention or desire to move the club permanently to Longview and leave our valuable property here to remain idle. Longview is providing a park without expense to the club, and we believe the novelty of Texas League baseball in the new oil center will result in better patronage than could have been expected here for the remainder of the season.

Whether McEvoy’s statement allayed fears in Wichita Falls that the Spudders’ departure was only for the balance of the season is doubtful; Parker clearly was skeptical. What was obvious was that the struggling franchise was moving to greener pastures. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, which took an interest in the Browns’ minor league affiliates, observed that Longview and Tyler, which was witnessing the relocation of the Shreveport Sports in Tyler, are “… in the rich new oil field of East Texas and have recently jumped from populations of around 10,000 each to fair sized young cities.” The final collapse of the Wichita Falls’ membership in the Texas League came as no surprise to anyone who paid attention to the events surrounding the Spudders’ faltering attendance figures. In Shreveport, Louisiana, where another Texas League team faced serious problems with declining attendance, the *Shreveport Journal* observed, “… ever since the edge was ripped off the oil excitement at Wichita Falls, baseball interest there has been on the decline until now a weekday crowd there means only 40 or 50 paid admissions.” Others had seen the Spudders change of venue in the offing, and viewed the decision to move to East Texas as necessary and sensible.

East Texas was, indeed, a lively scene early in the 1930s. When the great oil boom inaugurated by Dad Joiner’s stunning discoveries restructured the economy of East Texas, prosperity seemed everywhere in spite of the Depression. Gregg County, where Longview was located, had not produced a single barrel of oil in 1930, but when the great East Texas oil boom got underway the fields in Gregg County yielded 80,765,000 barrels in 1932. Combined with nearby Rusk County’s production, the East Texas oil fields produced 121,944,000 barrels of oil, nearly one-half of Texas’ output of 312,256,000 barrels in 1932. Money, population, and human energy flowed into East Texas in enormous volumes early in the 1930s and an enormous quantity of oil flowed out of East Texas into the nation’s economy. It was a heady time for everyone. Towns and counties grew wildly. Between 1930 and 1940, the Gregg County population rose from 15,778 to 58,456, an increase of 267 percent. During the same period, the city of Longview tripled in size and Tyler nearly
doubled its population.24 As chaotic as life in East Texas appeared sometimes to be, opportunity was everywhere, or so it seemed. The East Texas oil fields also produced the legends of overnight wealth, and McEvoy and the Spudders' front office staff and their partners in the St. Louis Browns were seduced by what they saw in Longview.

Another Texas League franchise, the Shreveport Sports, experienced a different sort of crisis and also moved to East Texas. Shreveport joined the Texas League in 1917, and even though it was one of the smaller cities in the league, it had always been a good baseball town and occasionally drew more fans than the Houston Buffaloes and the San Antonio Indians who played their games amidst a larger population base. In the benchmark year of 1926, Shreveport finished fourth in the league standings and fourth in attendance when the Sports drew 143,794 patrons to home games.25 In 1931, the Sports fell to sixth place in the pennant race and ironically also finished in sixth place in attendance with a total of 57,572 paid admissions.26 O.L. Biedenharn, one of the pioneer bottlers of Coca-Cola and a wealthy man and owner of the Sports and Biedenharn Park where the team played home games in Shreveport, became weary of the daily struggle to promote his club and during the winter of 1931-1932 decided to sell his franchise.27 He sold his interest in the Sports to an organization known as the Caddo Baseball Association which was headed by B.A. Hardy and J. Walter Morris,28 but retained ownership of the ball park. Biedenharn Park was a relatively valuable property. In 1930, Biedenharn had installed lights for night ball, and in recent years it also had become a site for evening football games for local high schools and for Centenary College games, all of which yielded revenue to Biedenharn.29

When the 1932 season got underway, the Sports got off to a slow start in the pennant race and attendance lagged badly. Thirty-nine year old George Sisler, a fifteen-year veteran of the major leagues and a career .340 hitter, had been hired to play first base and to serve as the Sports' manager. Even though he was a hard-driving, hard-nosed baseball man, the Sports played dull and uninspired baseball.30 Hardy and Morris and their partners in the Caddo Baseball Association were disappointed with the Sports' early season performance but patiently waited for the team's fortunes to improve and for a surge at the ticket window. Instead, disaster struck the Sports. On the night of May 4, 1932, after a game with the Galveston Cubs, Biedenharn Park was destroyed by fire.31 Night watchman Carl "Bud" Newman was sweeping trash in the west section of the grandstand when he heard a small explosion and immediately a blaze erupted and swept through the park. George White of the Dallas Morning News described the results of the fire in his column: "Everything was destroyed except the umpires dressing room, the negro bleachers, and the club office. Included in the equipment that went up in the flames were all those of the Sport's uniforms, caps, hose, shoes and gloves and the Galveston club's bats which were in a trunk in the visitors dugout."32 The floundering Sports were homeless.

About the only advantage the Shreveport ownership had as they surveyed the damage was that the Sports were scheduled to return to the road after only
three more home games on May 6, 7, and 8. Rather than give up sorely needed
gate receipts, the owners of the Sports sought a temporary site to play the
Indians. Then, once the team left Shreveport for nearly two weeks, a more
suitable solution to the Sports' plight could be, the Caddo Baseball Association
hoped, devised. Nearby Longview, Texas, was in the process of renovating its
ball park in anticipation of acquiring a minor league team, and the Sports
arranged to play the first of the three games with San Antonio in Longview. On
May 6, 1932, the Sports played the Indians in Longview before 2,000
spectators and lost by a score of 7-5. Longview's city leadership was negoti­
tiating with the Wichita Fall Spudders when the Shreveport team came to town
looking for a temporary home. Final settlement of the deal to bring the
Spudders to Longview was in the offing, but many of the town's baseball fans
wanted the Sports to become their team. With only twenty-four hours notice,
2,000 fans had turned out to see the game, and enthusiasm for the Sports,
which had many fans locally, was high. While the members of the Caddo
Baseball Association did not know the details of the discussions between
Longview and the Spudders, they were not unaware that Wichita Falls
ownership also sought a new site to finish the season. The Caddo group also
knew that Tyler, Texas, wanted a Texas League team, and when the city offered
the Sports the use of a field for the remaining games with San Antonio, the
Sports readily accepted. The teams moved to Tyler, and on May 7 and 8 played
two more games before a total of about 4,000 fans. The Sports and the Indians
played the second game in a cold, drizzling rain which inhibited attendance, but
the overall ticket sales proved satisfying to the harried members of Shreveport's
front office staff. San Antonio won the first game and Shreveport the second.
Then the Sports went on to San Antonio to begin the road series.

Then the Sports ran into more bad fortune: George Sisler quit as mana­
ger. He had not been happy with his situation in Shreveport, and the uncer­
tainty of the team's future and the Sports' poor performance prompted his
departure, which further demoralized the team as the Sports embarked on a
long road trip. Not much more could go wrong for the Sports it seemed, but
more bad news was coming. Biedenham, who owned the Sports' park in
Shreveport, received a $35,000 insurance payment for the losses incurred
when the fire destroyed his ball park. In the uncertainty and confusion that
followed the fire, local baseball fans, newspapers, and members of the Caddo
Baseball Association confidently expected Biedenham, a longtime backer of
minor league baseball, to rebuild the ball park. But on May 10 Biedenham
announced that he would not do so. He declared that he had already lost
$25,000 on baseball in Shreveport and would lose no more.

Now that the Shreveport team was officially homeless, leaders in Tyler,
Texas, eagerly offered a home to the Shreveport team. Only two days after the
fire destroyed Biedenharn Park, a group of Tyler businessmen headed by Gus
Taylor, president of the Citizens National Bank and of the East Texas Chamber
of Commerce, contacted the Texas League office about transferring the Sports
to Tyler. Longview leaders, who had seen 2,000 enthusiastic fans attend the
game on May 6 between the Sports and the Indians in Longview, objected to
Tyler's proposal. Longview also wanted a Texas League team to celebrate its status as a booming, growing town, and many local fans already had an allegiance to the Sports. J. Alvin Gardiner, who was president of the Texas League, took the Tyler petition under advisement and adopted a wait-and-see policy since he knew that the Spudders were also looking for a new home. In the back of his mind, Gardiner realized that neither Longview nor Tyler were good sites for a permanent location of league franchises. The towns were practically adjacent to each other and too many teams in so small an area would lessen the prestige of the league, and small communities, regardless of the level of local prosperity, lacked the population base to support a team through a long season. Larger towns were certainly more desirable for permanent relocation of the Sports and the Spudders, but Gardiner realized that the Texas League had to re-deploy two of its franchises.

On May 14, 1932, Gardiner authorized the Sports to relocate in Tyler for the remainder of the season and declared that the team would henceforth be known as the "Trojans." Workmen in Tyler rushed renovations to the city's ball park so it would be ready for the Trojans when they came home to their new home the following week. Meanwhile, in Wichita Falls and Longview, the final details were negotiated for the Spudders to relocate in Longview. Not to be outdone by Tyler, Longview had begun the construction of a 3,000 seat grandstand in the southwest corner of the Gregg County Fair Grounds which was to be completed by May 25 when the Spudders, now officially committed to relocation in Longview, would open their first homestand. According to The Dallas Morning News, the new field featured a section sixty-feet long behind the catcher, and seats 120 feet down the third and first base lines with a "... section for Negroes in right field." Each town took its entry into the Texas League seriously, and made every effort to impress the league leadership and the management and players of the teams relocating in their new facilities.

Although Gardiner renamed the Sports as the "Trojans," the fans in Tyler did not accept the change. Instead, a local poll was taken and a majority declared that they preferred the team to retain its original name. So, for the balance of the summer of 1932, Tyler's team continued to be known as the "Sports." Longview, on the other hand, renamed the Spudders the "Cannibals." The unusual name had originated forty years earlier when the Texas League's San Antonio club lost an exhibition game to a local semi-pro team during an unscheduled stop in Longview in 1895, and C.B. Cunningham, who covered San Antonio for several state newspapers, wrote, "... Longview Cannibals ate up the San Antonio Missions here this afternoon." Cunningham gave the name "Cannibals" to a nameless semi-professional team, and from that time forward, it became standard practice for Longview teams to style themselves as the Cannibals. Sportswriter A.D. Parker of the Wichita Daily Times was not happy with his beloved Spudders' reincarnation as the Cannibals. He wrote: "There is something distasteful about that name. To us, it brings up the picture of a circle of black savages dancing weirdly around a boiling pot, nothing else." Whatever emotions fans and sportswriters
experienced over the relocation and renaming of Texas League franchises, the ailing Wichita Falls Spudders and the orphaned Shreveport Sports had new homes, and for the first time since 1914 all of the Texas League teams were located in Texas.\textsuperscript{45}

The Tyler Sports opened at home against the Longview Cannibals on Saturday, May 21, 1932.\textsuperscript{46} A crowd of 4,000 came to the game and Governor R.S. Sterling threw out the first ball to Gus Taylor, leader of the group that brought the team to Tyler. Except that the Cannibals defeated Tyler 5 to 3, the whole afternoon was a festive one. The next day drew and estimated 4,500 spectators to the park.\textsuperscript{47} After finishing a series with Tyler, the Longview Cannibals made their first appearance in Longview on May 25 against the Fort Worth Panthers, better remembered as the “Cats”.\textsuperscript{48} The Cannibals were one game under .500 when they opened their first home series, and they pleased the hometown folks with a 4-2 victory over the Cats. J. Alvin Gardiner attended the game, which was accompanied by the usual gala associated with an opening day.

When the Tyler and Longview teams opened their Texas League campaigns in their new homes, their won-lost records stood at 11-24 and 18-21 respectively.\textsuperscript{49} Neither team did well after relocating. The Sports won 46 and lost 69 games while representing Tyler and finished last in the Texas League standings; the Longview Cannibals did a little better and amassed a 47 and 62 record, which overall placed them fifth when the season ended. Neither team did well at the ticket window, either. When the Spudders moved to Longview and became the Cannibals, the team had drawn about 9,300 paid admissions in Wichita Falls. The Cannibals attracted 37,811 in Longview for a combined attendance of 46,211, and the Shreveport/Tyler Sports attracted a total of 45,517 paid admissions.\textsuperscript{50} Overall, the Sports averaged 606 fans per home date, and the Spudders/Cannibals averaged 608. Tyler’s attendance fell so dramatically near the season’s end that the Caddo Baseball Association surrendered the franchise to the league office and the Sports and the Dallas Steers attempted to transfer their last three games in Tyler to Dallas to attract better gate receipts, but the owners in the Texas League disapproved the plan.\textsuperscript{51} President Gardiner’s concern over the small population bases in Tyler and Longview appeared vindicated. Dallas, for example, drew an average of 2,019 per home game, and Houston attracted an average of 1,458 while finishing second and third respectively behind pennant winner Beaumont.\textsuperscript{52} Gardiner knew that Tyler and Longview wanted to retain their teams, but he, and many of the Texas League owners, quietly waited for the season to end. Then, in a atmosphere less charged by crisis and in a site outside East Texas, the league’s owners would decide the futures of the Sports and the Cannibals.

Tyler’s civic leaders made every effort to impress the league’s ownership and management and spared no expense to upgrade the team’s playing facilities. On July 7, 1932, the Sports defeated Longview 6-5 in Tyler under lights the city installed to illuminate the park.\textsuperscript{53} The Tyler-Longview game was the first night game played in East Texas, and helped to popularize the coming era of night sports events, especially high school football, in small-town
Night baseball was a novelty in East Texas in 1932, but it did not greatly stimulate ticket sales. Longview continued to play day baseball for the remainder of the season while the Cannibals’ partisans valiantly tried to boost attendance and to promote the impression that the Longview ought to be a permanent member of the Texas league.  

Bad luck and misfortune continued to stalk the Texas League. On June 18 the San Antonio ball park was consumed by fire, and another move of a Texas League franchise appeared imminent. When the news of the fire reached Amarillo, city leaders immediately began to lobby the Texas League to relocate the Indians in the Panhandle. Amarillo’s hopes to join the Texas League were dashed when the San Antonio team’s owner, Homer H. Hammond, relocated the Indians in a temporary site in San Antonio. The Longview park was struck by a tornado a few days later and the roof of the grandstand was destroyed; and on August 14 a line of thunderstorms struck Houston and Galveston and damaged Moody Stadium in Galveston and Buffalo Stadium in Houston. In addition to the natural disasters that plagued the Texas League, the Fort Worth Panthers nearly collapsed in 1932. The Panthers’ owners, Sam S. Lard and Ted Robinson, became frustrated by their team’s dismal performance on the field and at the ticket window and offered to turn the team over to the Texas League in mid-July. President Gardiner persuaded Lard to reorganize the team and appoint Clarence “Big Boy” Kraft, a popular Fort Worth player in the past, to replace Robinson as club president. That was done, and the Fort Worth team financially limped through the final weeks of the season and avoided collapse.

When the season ended in September, the Texas League’s leadership faced a difficult question. Should it allow Longview and Tyler to retain league franchises or relocate them? Each wanted to remain in the Texas League, and each failed to convince the lords of baseball that it could supply sufficient numbers of fans to home games. Longview and Tyler soon had potent competitors for the permanent placement of league franchises. J. Alvin Gardiner and some of the informed insiders in the league knew was that a reorganization of the Class A Western League was imminent, and they watched with keen interest. The Western League was one of the better minor leagues, but it also faced a crisis in 1932. Attendance lagged and teams struggled to make ends meet. It was an eight-team league, as was the Texas League, but, unlike the Texas League, whose franchises were located within a radius of about 200 miles of Dallas, its franchises were located in Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska, and travel costs weighed heavily upon its members. After the Western League’s season ended and as the league prepared to reorganize, the teams in Colorado went out of business and the teams in Oklahoma City and Tulsa sought homes elsewhere.

As the Western League prepared to restructure itself, informed baseball fans realized that Longview and Tyler were doomed as Texas League sites. On November 3, 1932, The Sporting News reported:

According to the plan of reorganization of the Western League, these two Oklahoma teams [Tulsa and Oklahoma City] will be dropped off, which
would afford the Texas League a chance to take in one or both of them. There are several weak sisters in the loop that it might be profitable to eliminate in favor of the two Western League cities.

The handwriting was on the wall. Little chance for renewal now seemed likely for the two East Texas towns. The following month the Texas League admitted Oklahoma City and Tulsa to its ranks while the fates of Longview and Tyler remained unresolved. As it stood just after the first of the year, the league faced 1933 with ten teams, but the Texas League traditionally was an eight-team league and the possibility of an enlarged loop never intrigued Gardiner. He was convinced that the status of the Texas League was, in part, dependent upon locating franchises in the principal cities of the southwest, and he never viewed Tyler and Longview as prime candidates for permanent membership. Finally, a simple solution appeared. The San Antonio team had faltered toward the end of the 1932 season, and home attendance at late season games became so sparse that the Indians' last series of the season with the Dallas Rebels was transferred to Dallas in a quest to sell more tickets. The Indians' owner, Homer H. Hammond, struggled to get his franchise in order during the winter of 1932-33, but proved unable to do so and it simply collapsed. When that occurred, the league allowed the St. Louis Browns to move their Longview Cannibals to San Antonio, and to name them the Missions. That decision finished one East Texas town's Texas League affiliation.

Tyler soon lost its membership in the league. The Fort Worth Panthers, who also had finished the 1932 season on the brink of financial disaster, underwent a change in ownership. Norman Perry, a "sportsman" from Indianapolis, Indiana, who owned the Indianapolis team in the American Association, bought Ted Robinson's interest in the Panthers in December 1932. Perry did not purchase absolute control of the Panthers, but his investment as a minority owner stabilized the ailing Cats and, as a part of the deal he made with the Texas League, Perry was awarded the Tyler Sports' roster to add to the Fort Worth team. That ended Tyler's membership in the Texas League.

Longview and Tyler each entered teams in the Class C Dixie League in 1933, and remained in the league when it was renamed the West Dixie League in 1934. Longview and Tyler joined the East Texas League in 1935 and remained there until the outbreak of World War II, when many minor leagues suspended operations. The East Texas League, which was composed of teams located in Tyler, Longview, Marshall, Henderson, Palestine, Texarkana, and Kilgore, Texas, was a Class C league three notches below the Class A1 Texas League. Even though the members of the East Texas League were in the midst of the great furor of the oil boom in East Texas, they were still viewed as small-town venues for baseball.

In 1932, Tyler and Longview played vital roles in assisting the Texas League survive a difficult year. Neither city was fully prepared to meet the needs of the league on a permanent basis, but in its hour of need, the Texas League found succor in two oil-enriched, burgeoning communities, and an interesting footnote to professional baseball occurred in East Texas.


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*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 19, 1930, p. 1B.

*The Shreveport Journal*, May 12, 1932, p. 11.


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*The Sporting News*, March 10, 1932.

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"The Sporting News, September 1, 1932.
"The Sporting News, February 19, 1933, II-2. O'Neal, The Texas League, p. 297. To placate Hammond, he was appointed a vice president of the Texas League which was largely an honorary post, but supposedly salve to his injured ego. The Dallas Morning News, February 19, 1932.
"Johnson and Wolff, Encyclopedia of Minor League Baseball, pp. 81-82.