

Babe Ruth

Series: Legends



Babe Ruth at a hunting lodge on the North Carolina coast, 1928. Courtesy N.C. Museum of History

You've probably heard of Babe Ruth, the great baseball player. But did you know that he hit his first home run in North Carolina? Or—at least as the story goes—that he got his nickname in the state?

George Herman “Babe” Ruth was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1895. He was raised in an orphanage because his parents couldn't control him. In 1914 he signed a baseball contract with the Baltimore Orioles. In those days the Orioles were a minor league team in the International League. In March 1914 the team held spring training in Fayetteville.

Ruth was in Fayetteville for only about a month, but he always remembered it. It was the first time he had ever been out of Baltimore. Ruth later wrote about how much fun he had riding the elevators in his hotel.

According to one legend, the young and inexperienced Ruth didn't know what to do on his own in Fayetteville, and so he followed around the team's manager and owner, Jack Dunn. One of the team members said, “There goes Dunn's new babe,” and the name stuck.

On March 7, 1914, Ruth played in his first Orioles game. The members of the team were divided into two sides, the Buzzards and the Sparrows. Ruth was a Buzzard. He hit a long home run, the longest one the crowd of spectators had ever seen. It was his first home run. “I hit it as I hit all the others, by taking a good gander at the pitch as it came up to the plate, twisting my body into a backswing, and then hitting it as hard as I could swing,” said Ruth. The Buzzards won the game, 15 to 9.

Ruth started his professional baseball career as a pitcher. He pitched well during spring training in Fayetteville, even against major league teams. On March 25 the Orioles beat the Philadelphia Athletics, 6 to 2. The Athletics were the best team in the American League. Many people predicted that Ruth would be a great baseball player.

During his short stay in North Carolina, Ruth learned that he could hold his own against the best players in the game. He was on his way to the top. In fact, he joined a major league team only a few months after his visit to Fayetteville.

In 1921 Curtiss Candy Company began making the Baby Ruth candy bar. Ruth was famous by then, and many people thought the candy bar was named after him. The company, however, said that the sweet was named after President Grover Cleveland's daughter, Ruth. Some people believe that Curtiss Candy Company made up that story so

that it wouldn't have to pay Babe Ruth for using his name. Which story do you believe? (By the way, you can still buy Baby Ruth candy bars today!)

In the 1920s and 1930s, when he was the most famous baseball player in the world, Ruth frequently visited North Carolina in the off-season to hunt and play golf. And he always remembered his early days in Fayetteville when he was on the road to becoming a legend.