

# Woman Who Helps Run Western League

By ELLA FLEISHMAN.

"Hit the ball where they ain't wins the game,  
A hit and a run makes the fun."

**T**HIS is Mrs. W. A. Rourke's favorite recipe for a base ball game to the uninitiated. Mrs. Rourke is "Pa" Rourke's wife, "Pa" being the president of the Omaha base ball club. Mrs. Rourke used to be "Mamie" Kelly of Nebraska Telephone company fame. Everyone who has ever had anything to do with the telephone company knows Mamie. She made hundreds of friends during the many years of her service at the company and the tribute paid her by the highest officials in the company is enough to make even "Abe" Lincoln jealous.

The Mamie that was so thoroughly informed on office matters is going at base ball with the same degree of efficiency and desire to know all about it, even to the business end. You can't "feaze" Mamie by asking her pointblank what a "fielder's choice" or a "squeeze play" is. She comes right back at you, even if these are terms that many an ardent base ball fan couldn't define. And she can tell you what a "triple play" is right off the bat, even though she admits that she has never seen it.

Mamie appreciates clever playing. "Isn't Krug the 'heady' player!" she exclaimed. And she will tell you in a minute which member of a team is "solid ivory." When Mamie isn't pleased with the umpire's decision, she vents her displeasure by telling him to "wipe the sand out of his eyes."

"Pa" Rourke's wife has the genuine Irish blarney down pat. She knows the base ball fans by name and greets each and every one with a smile and a cheery word in her own naive manner.

"Boosters' day," when the game wasn't called until 4 o'clock, the temperature had been flirting with the 100 degree mark all afternoon. It was Friday and a double-header had been advertised for Sunday. Just before the game was called the telephone rang sharply out at the park. Mrs. Rourke excused herself and hastened to answer.

"What is the score for the first game?" came in a woman's voice.

"The first game has been postponed on account of the rain," replied Mamie; "the second won't be called until 4 o'clock."

Mrs. Rourke travels right along with Mr. Rourke and the team and hasn't missed one game this year, with the exception of the last few played in Topeka, which she did not attend because they received a wire to come home.

"Why, I just naturally look forward to 3 o'clock for the ball game to start," she said. "It's fun to watch the people who come to the game. The most inveterate base ball fans are professional men and women, doctors, lawyers and nurses, who tell me that they come here to relax from their brain-fagging work. They say that they go back to the city very much refreshed and many of them tell me that the base ball park is perhaps the coolest spot in town."

Mrs. Rourke likes to travel along with the team and enjoys the entertainment that is accorded them as well as the funny experiences with which she meets. When they were in Denver in June, Mr. and Mrs. Rourke and the ball club were entertained at a box party at the Broadway theater by Nat Goodwin, when Nat interspersed a great deal about the Omaha team between the lines of the play. He is an old friend of "Pa" Rourke, and never misses a game when he can get away from the theater.

At the game in Sioux City she sat next a typical farmer, who confided to her that "Omaha had a rotten team, gosh darn it." It so happened that the break in luck was with Omaha that day, which didn't "feaze" the country gentleman in the least.

"Goll ding it, that Sioux City team hain't got a thing on Omaha," he yelled, stamping his feet all the while. Showing that the fans get so excited over a good play that they are apt to be as changeable as the wind or weather.

"I was always interested in base ball, ever since I was a little girl, because my brothers always talked so much about it," said Mrs. Rourke. "Every Saturday afternoon or Sunday that I could slip away to the game I always did so." But she stoutly denies that base ball had anything to do with her meeting "Pa" Rourke. She says that her mother and "Pa" Rourke's mother were friends for a great many years and the friendship between them grew up in that manner.

Mrs. Rourke laughs as she tells the following incident to her betrothal days. Some one who had heard Mr. Rourke familiarly spoken of as "Pa" had conceived the idea that he was an exceedingly elderly, bewhiskered gentleman.

"Why, Mamie," she exclaimed, "you're not going to marry such an old man, are you? Why he's 'pa'!"

Neither Mr. or Mrs. Rourke have gotten over their honeymoon yet and are constantly recalling incidents of that trip. Mr. Rourke tells an amusing joke on his wife, much to her discomfort.

"When we arrived in New York City, it was just at dusk and I hadn't gotten my bearings correctly, so that we got lost somewhere on Forty-second street. My wife went up to a big Irish policeman who was standing on the corner and asked to be directed to a certain address. Well, Mamie was all dolled up in her 'go-away' gown and the Irish boob thought she was trying to flirt with him, so instead of answering her question, he just stood and smiled at her and answered not a word she was all alone. Well, I caught the situation immediately, but Mamie she couldn't understand why she grinned at her without answering. She doesn't think very much of New York policeman."

Mr. Rourke tells another one about his wife. On their recent trip to Denver they met his old friend Jim Flynn, the prize fighter.

"Well, sir, Mrs. Rourke refused to believe that



Mr. and Mrs. W.A. Rourke

such a small fellow as he could be a prize fighter. She imagined they had to be giants."

He said that this spring Mrs. Rourke used to "pan" him every day about the players. "Why don't you get new pitchers?" he would say, just as if you run out and pick them off the street.

Mrs. Rourke has a host of amusing stories to tell of women who attend the base ball games. Some of them admire base ball players as much as matinee idols and give them nicknames also. One player especially is quite a ladies' favorite and because of his dignified manner the women call him "Colonel."

One day one of the best ball players booted a ball that cost a couple of runs. "Why doesn't your husband fire that man, Mrs. Rourke?" a woman asked her.

If they are pleased with his playing, they say "Tell Mr. Rourke never to let him go."

Mrs. Rourke tells this one about a woman who didn't understand the game but was enthusiastic anyway. She had been watching the game intently for some time and had her attention focused on the pitcher.

"Oh, Mrs. Rourke," she exclaimed, "I think he

is the loveliest pitcher. Every time he throws a ball he hits the batter's bat."

One day a party of women came out as guests on ladies' day.

"I think this is the rottenest ball game I ever saw," said one of the women.

"How many have you seen, Mrs. Blank?" asked Mamie, of the quick Irish wit.

"Oh, this is the first game I've ever attended," was the reply.

The oft-repeated question, according to Mrs. Rourke, is "Are you going to win today?" Mrs. Rourke looks forward to entertaining the

women who will be here in November when their men folks come to attend the convention of the National Association of Professional Base Ball Leagues in Omaha.

Mr. Rourke was the originator of ladies' day in the Western league and has been sponsor of the movement in organized base ball to have a national children's day each year, the proceeds to be turned over to the public playgrounds fund. Mr. Rourke will push this matter at the convention this fall.

Over 10,000 children attended the last children's day game when Mr. Rourke turned over the whole direction of the affair to Mrs. Rourke, because he was too busy to attend to it. All the children of the public institutions were especial guests of honor and many of the children came up to her after the game to thank her for the treat and ask that it be repeated next year.

Mrs. Rourke is very much interested in keeping the Omaha club and all that pertains to it up to the standard and is very proud of the electric scoreboard in use at the park, the only one in the Western league. She is as personally interested in each of the players as she was in each one at the telephone company and likes to watch them travel up to the major leagues. If they make a pretty play, no one cheers louder than she. They have two pennants, that of 1904 and 1907, and a number of base ball pictures in their home, of which they are very proud.

"Fans are being educated nowadays," said Mrs. Rourke. "The base ball crowds are different than they used to be. They come to look at a scientific game and don't care so much about which team wins. It's only the newspaper and scoreboard readers, who never attend the game, that holler about the home team not winning. The others know that one team has to win and go out to see the sport. It used to be 'win, no matter how'—now they want to see a scientific performance. Then there is always a fascination about the 'breaks,' luck and otherwise."

Mrs. Rourke is very proud of the mascot of the team, her little 3-year-old nephew, Hugh McKenna, her sister's son. She bought him a complete player's outfit and on his birthday "Pa" bought him a glove and ball.

"I'm going to be a base ball player," says little Hugh, "but you'll have to get me a mask, too."

At the telephone company, officials vie with each other in saying splendid things about Mamie. Her genial smile, big-heartedness, Irish wit and efficiency endeared her to everyone with whom she came in contact. She had been with the company for nearly fifteen years, having started as an operator, later a stenographer, then private secretary and cashier. She was invaluable to the heads of the company.

"We never found anyone to take her place when she left and we never will," said W. A. Pixley, general auditor, regretfully. "If she had been a man, she would have risen to the managership of the Omaha exchange, and, indeed, many times she did the work of a manager. Not that we discriminate against women," he explained apologetically, "but, you see, we can't tell what day they will up and leave us to get married. We consider that because of her loyal service she helped build up the telephone company in this city."

Mamie herself tells the following incident of those days. "My name is Mary Ellen, but everyone calls me Mamie or by my initials 'M. K.' One day an old gentleman, slightly deaf, had occasion to stand by my window for some time and heard the office force call me familiarly 'M. K.' At last he could stand it no longer, and, approaching the window, he raised his glasses to his eyes, made a trumpet of the palm of his hand to his ear, and asked querulously:

"Young woman, are you 'Aunt Kate' to all these people here?"

She always looked out for the welfare of the other employees, who often came to her for advice when they were in trouble, and she looked after many of their bank accounts.

"Why, come to think of it, she used to take care of my bank account, too," said one of the high officials. "When my wife wanted anything done she never called me. She used to say, 'I'll call Mamie Kelly. She'll get it done for me. Maybe you'll think of it and maybe you won't.'"

The public would tell all their troubles to Mamie. Sometimes a dissatisfied patron would come in who didn't wish to pay a bill or had some complaint to make, but Mamie always got the money. And when it came to matching wits Mamie was there and over.

"One of the worst half-hours I ever spent in my life was one that Mamie gave me when she was bent on mischief one day," said W. B. T. Belt, general superintendent.

"One morning eight toll operators came into my office and informed me that they were leaving, to be married within the month. That was in the days when our working force was seriously demoralized because there had been so many marriages depriving us of our experienced girls. Well, you know it takes a long while to break a girl into the toll work, and I was dreadfully put out about it. However, I comforted myself, for I thought 'Mamie's here; she'll take care of the situation all right.'"

"Upon returning from luncheon that day, my heart jumped into my throat when I chanced to notice a diamond solitaire gleaming on Mamie's engagement finger. I was so put out I couldn't say a word to her about it, but later I called her into the office and asked her what the ring on her finger meant. Then she told me that she had worn it only to tease me. My, but I was relieved."

"Mamie was a winner at everything that she undertook. Why, I look forward to a winning base ball team now that Mamie has taken hold of it. The reason they haven't got it now, I venture to say, is because Mamie isn't in full charge of it yet," was Mr. Belt's parting tribute.