



GEORGE JOHNSON,
Catcher of the Long Prairie 1909
Baseball Team.

George Johnson, who is catching for Long Prairie this season is one of the great ball players of the country. He is still a young man notwithstanding the fact that he has been playing professional ball for fourteen years. During his career he has rubbed up against all the big players in the country, has coached out teams in the National and Western and American Association leagues and has probably developed as many young pitchers who are now making good in fast company as any other catcher in the land. But for the accident of color, "Rat" as he is familiarly known, could occupy a berth of his own choosing in any one of the big leagues and without doubt could make many of the present big league backstops look as if it were time for them to journey back to the tall weeds.

Johnson was born in Bellaire, Ohio, 34 years ago. He received his education there, attending the graded and the high schools of the city. As a boy he played ball on the "kid" teams of the city and was early marked as a "phenom." He played

on white teams in and around Belleaire and other neighboring towns when he was thirteen and fourteen years old and acquired quite a reputation even at this early age. He got into professional ball when eighteen years of age and has made ball playing his business ever since.

In 1896 he was signed to play with the Page Fence Giants, the greatest colored team in the country. He played left field for this team one season and first base the next and then was offered the position behind the bat. He was with this great team until it disbanded four years later. During this time, the Giants played nearly every important team in the country. This was before the days of the league agreements not to play independent teams and the big leaguers were often looking for a chance to jump into a town and play some independent team. During these four years the Page Fence Giants defeated every team in the Western league and such fast National leaguers as the Cincinnati's and the Chicago's, the latter having later

won the world's championship series. The Page Fence Giants were organized primarily to advertise the Page Fencing and Monarch buggies and the managements of these concerns supported the team. They traveled all over the country in their own special car and played everything they could get games with.

In 1900 Johnson joined the Columbia Giants of Chicago another colored team and played with them for several years. This was a very fast aggregation being made up largely from the Page Giants' team and they made a record against the league teams that was even better than that made by the Page Giants. The Columbia Giants won games from the Chicago Americans and the Chicago Nationals while they out-classed such speedy teams as Detroit, Milwaukee, Columbus and Kansas City of the American Association. The Columbia's had their own park in Chicago and it was a favorite place for the big teams to stop to and from their western trips. Dur-

ing these years some of the greatest games in the city were played by the big leaguers against the crack colored team. Wilson, the great colored pitcher, pitched for the team those days and Wilson and Johnson were regarded as one of the greatest batteries in the business.

After leaving the Columbia's, Johnson went with the Chicago Union's another colored team. He was with them one year and then became associated with the great colored team that made Algona, Iowa so famous in 1903 and 1904. This team beat out everything in the territory, the baseball fans will remember how they ended the season by disasterously defeating the Des Moines champions of the Western league.

Johnson left Algona and joined the Renville, Minnesota team the next year. Wilson went with him. They

formed the famous colored battery that gave Renville the state championship in 1905.

The next summer Johnson went east and caught for the Philadelphia Giants, a colored team. This team defeated the Philadelphia Nationals in exhibition games and also beat the Philadelphia Americans with

Rube Waddell pitching. The Giants were in a class by themselves and repeatedly beat the leaders of the Eastern Tri-State league, defeating such teams as Willmington, Johnstown, Trenton, Altoona, Williamsport and Wilkesbarre.

He left the east in 1907 and came west to take charge of the Colored Gophers and played with that team during 1907 and 1908. Barton of the Gophers has accompanied Johnson ever since he started playing with the Page Fence Giants and Wilson, the colored pitcher, played with him up to within the past three years. Last fall the Colored Gophers defeated the St. Paul league team at the close of the season in two games, shutting them out 2 to 0 the first game and winning 2 to 1 the second game

This spring Johnson was engaged by the St Paul management to take the team to Little Rock, Arkansas,

Long Prairie Leader, Long Prairie, MN

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