

The Lodi Zeps 1923

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Throughout my youth and well into adulthood I'd while away many a lazy Sunday afternoon listening to my uncle Joe Della Radolfa reminisce about his days as a member of the Lodi Zeps baseball team. Uncle Joe, for those of you who may not already know, was owner and operator, along with his brother Pete, of Radolfa's Bar and Grill located on what was then Nicholson Street. Aside from serving shots and beer to his myriad customers Uncle Joe was known for his super delicious hamburgers. Ask anyone who is old enough to remember and what they'll describe to you is the greatest slab of chop meat ever to grace a roll. A hard roll at that! As hamburgers go Uncle Joe was way ahead of his time. Those gastronomic delights were served with lettuce, tomato, a sweet or hot pepper [take your pick] delivered to you on a fresh roll from Modern Bakery. Truck drivers from across the country were known to have lunched there to experience those legendary burgers.

Anyway where was I? Oh yea the Lodi Zeps. The club was one of Lodi's first uniformed baseball teams along with the Rosemont's and the Arnot Athletic Club. The year was 1923, Uncle Joe, an excellent multi-faceted player, was noted for his prowess behind the plate. He used to display his bent fingers to me and my cousin Johnny Pesenti as if they were badges of honor. Each arthritic finger had a story attached to it while each scar was re-examined and re-lived. Sure we heard those marvelous stories on more than one occasion yet we never tired of them. Uncle Joe's enthusiasm and his play by play descriptions kept us glued to our seats. It was like being sent into the past by way of a living time machine. It was like listening to the game on the radio and picturing the action on the baseball field of my mind.

I recently had the good fortune of finding a 1923 photo of the Lodi Zeps. Uncle Joe is seated at the far left in the middle row. As for his team mates, sorry, I can't identify them. By now, 2019, they are together again playing baseball somewhere in the Borough of Lodi's own "Field of Dreams."



This photo of the the Lodi Zeps baseball team, circa 1923, was found in the archives of the Borough of Lodi.

1923