

KELTNER'S HOT CORNER



Ken Keltner Badger State Chapter

November 2023 In This Issue:

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Upcoming Events

Keltner Fall Chapter Meeting
Saturday November 11 @ 11 AM
J&B's Bar & Grill

**Historic Hinchliffe Stadium
With Donna Muscarella**
Zoom, November 29 @ 7 PM CST
Register in advance [here](#).

**Keltner Book Club
Author Lincoln A Mitchell**
*The One Hundred Most Important
People in Baseball History*
Zoom Thursday, Dec 7 @ 7 PM CT
Register in advance [here](#).

Holiday Baseball Get Together
J&B's Blue Ribbon Bar & Grill
Saturday, December 9 @ 2PM

Called Up with author Zak Ford
Zoom, Wed., Dec 13 @ 7 PM CT

Direct questions or comments to:
Dennis D. Degenhardt
bovine9@icloud.com • 262-339-9968

REST IN PEACE

Pete Ladd
July 17, 1956 – October 20, 2023

Frank Howard
August 8, 1936 – October 30, 2023

Welcome New Members
Phil Nero - Shorewood

Upcoming Events

Keltner Fall Chapter Meeting
Saturday, November 11 @ 11 AM
[J&B's Blue Ribbon Bar & Grill](#)
5230 W Bluemound, Milwaukee

Special Guest – Willie Mueller
Former Milwaukee Brewer Reliever
Major League Antagonist Duke Simpson

Former Milwaukee Brewer reliever, West Bend 's Willie Mueller, will be our special guest to talk about his baseball career and a few post baseball things, too. What does he know about the movie *Major League*? And what has he been doing to support baseball in West Bend, a hotbed for the game.



Starring **WILLIE MUELLER** "THE DUKE" *Major League*

We will also talk about the new SABR publication on One-Win Wonders that will be hitting our emails before the end of the year.

Special Session of Talking Baseball

Let's talk about the Brewer season of hope that ended to soon and what does the team's future look like. Also, the post season, is the format working, surprises, and disappointments.

If you can't make the meeting and you have some thoughts about these and other baseball topics, send those to [Dennis](#) and we will include those in the discussion.

Book Swap

Have books or memorabilia you would like to move to another home, bring it along for our swap, table.

Hinchliffe Stadium with Donna Muscarella
Wednesday November 29, 2023
Virtual Meeting - 7 PM CST



Donna Muscarella is a fourth-generation baseball enthusiast, photographer, mixed-media artist, and baseball card collector. She attended her first professional baseball game at age 2½ but was enthralled by the Game even earlier. While Donna does not limit her photography to baseball, it is her most compelling subject. She has a passion for capturing its sights and shapes with her camera lens, using art to share her love of baseball with the world.

Hinchliffe Stadium, one of the few Negro Leagues ballparks still standing, is a repeat subject of Donna's artwork. In 2021, she released her debut custom trading card set, which combines her photography of Hinchliffe with facts about its Negro Leagues ties and was featured in an article on *SABR's Baseball Card*

Research Committee Blog. Donna's Hinchliffe photography appeared on [Forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com) and in the third edition of *Turnstyle: The SABR Journal of Baseball Arts*, was recently requested by the YES Network and is slated for inclusion in the planned museum at Hinchliffe Stadium.

All attendees will be eligible to win a set of Hinchliffe Stadium custom trading cards, featuring Donna's fantastic photos along with interesting facts about the ballpark's Negro League ties."



Donna may be found on X, Instagram, and Threads using the handle @TheLensOfDonnaM. Some of her mixed-media artwork is visible in her online portfolio at [Behance.net/TheLensOfDonnaM](https://www.behance.net/TheLensOfDonnaM).

To learn more about historic Hinchliffe Stadium click [here](#). And to see the good work being done by the Friends of Hinchliffe, click [here](#).

To attend this presentation on Hinchliffe, register [here](#).



Holiday Baseball Get Together
Saturday, December 9 @ 2:00 PM

J&B's Blue Ribbon Bar & Grill - 5230 W Bluemound, Milwaukee



Once Thanksgiving arrives the next day almost becomes New Year's Day as the holiday season flashes by so quickly. Everyone's busy. Can we slow down for a couple of hours to get together to talk baseball and stuff, mostly enjoying being with fellow SABR members. Let's do so at J&Bs, grab a table, and sit around sharing some holiday cheer and swapping stories on Saturday, December 9th.



Called Up with author Zak Ford
Virtual, Wednesday, December 13 @ 7:00 PM CT

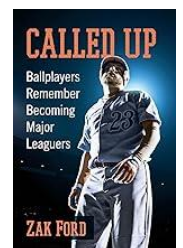
To reach the majors, a ballplayer must not only possess natural ability and world-class skills but must also overcome nearly insurmountable odds. The journey is not possible without extreme dedication. Along the way mentors play a large role, and circumstances must align. For an elite few, years of effort and perseverance culminate with putting on a big league uniform.

Drawing on original interviews with more than 100 players who debuted between 1961 and 2018, this collection presents their first-person stories of how they were called up to play Major League Baseball.

Zak Ford capture their players stories and relates them using their own words. He will talk about the process and with many former Brewers tell us their stories. If you enjoy hearing how players are told they are going to the show, you will enjoy this meeting. Also, this book will make a great holiday gift.

Buy/learn about *Called Up* [here](#). We will have a drawing for one attendee to receive a copy of the book.

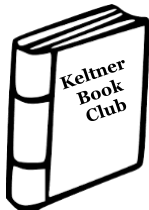
Watch for Zoom log-in information in the December *Keltner Hot Corner*.



Keltner Book Club News

By Mary Shea

Keltner Book Club Virtual Meeting
Thursday, December 7th, 7:00 PM CT
Special Guest: Author - Lincoln Mitchell



Our next book club selection will be *The One Hundred Most Important Players in Baseball History*, by Lincoln A. Mitchell. So, it's a countdown book, but this one focuses on players who aren't necessarily the greatest but have made significant and special contributions to baseball and society. Many are well known, but some are more obscure but nonetheless fascinating, including a few women. It includes plenty of unique insight and interesting nuggets and is really an enjoyable read.

All are welcome to attend. You can register for the Zoom meeting [here](#). SABR will forward login instructions.

Lincoln Mitchell has had a remarkable career as a scholar, political analyst, and writer. You can read more about him and his work [here](#).

More info on the book can be found [here](#):

The book is currently on backorder at [Boswell Books](#) in Milwaukee but can be ordered through Amazon or Barnes and Noble. All meeting attendees will be eligible for a drawing to win a copy of the book.

We Need Your Baseball Book Suggestions!

As most of our members read a lot about baseball, we'd like to share a list of everyone's favorite books in the December newsletter. It'd be cool to see what you're all into, from old favorites to more obscure selections. The list might also provide suggestions for holiday gifts. Please send your favorites and comments to mshea611@earthlink.net. Thanks to Dennis Degenhardt for the idea.

Hope you'll join us for an interesting conversation, and happy reading!

Mary



Good News/Bad News

Is this a definition of Good News/Bad News? The Milwaukee Brewers have played post season baseball nine times. Each time, they were ousted from the playoffs by a team that went on to play in the World Series, with six of them winning. Bad - they didn't win. But good – it took a World Series team to defeat them.

1981 - Yankees Lost WS
1982 - Cardinals Won WS
2008 - Phillies Won WS
2011 - Cardinals Won WS
2018 - Dodgers Lost WS



2019 - Nationals Won WS
2020 - Dodgers Won WS
2021 - Braves Won WS
2023 - D-backs Lost WS

Keltner Hot Corner Archives

You can now view or download past copies of the Keltner Hot Corner at: [Ken Keltner Badger State Newsletters](#)

Use of Links

Links in the *Keltner Hot Corner* are used to enhance the articles with the majority going to players SABR [BioProject](#) and [baseball-reference.com](#) as well as other related sites.

Who is Ken Keltner? See his SABR [Biography](#).

Get to Know...Stew Thornley

Thornley enjoys visiting the graves of notable people, especially those of Baseball Hall of Famers. He is so dedicated to this pursuit, Stew arrived at [Lou Boudreau's](#) grave site before the body. As he looks back to that day, "I was there before, during, and after."

Jon Stewart Thornley¹ was born on July 23, 1955, in Minneapolis, to Phyllis (Hubbard) Thornley and Howard Thornley. His mom taught at the University of Minnesota and in the Minneapolis Public Schools, as well as being a school librarian and later an executive in media/library at the Minneapolis Public Schools headquarters. Stew's dad, a foreman at the Minneapolis Post Office, was a B-17 waist gunner shot down during World War II, in a bombing mission over Germany, on December 22, 1943. Held captive until being liberated on May 2, 1945, Howard was imprisoned mostly at Stalag 17, where he knew the men who wrote the screenplay for the [Stalag 17](#) movie. Thornley's only brother, David, is a year-and-a-half older.

The proud life-long class clown plied his skills at Aquila School in suburban St. Louis Park through fourth grade. Thornley's next victims were at Tuttle School in Minneapolis for two years before taking his hormones and clowning skills to Marshall² Junior High followed by Marshall Senior High School in Minneapolis.

Although he watched baseball games on television, the first game Stew attended was a July 19, 1962, Jim Kaat, 8-0 shut out over Cleveland. But his strongest childhood memories were the excitement over the Twins, who were new to Minnesota. "I remember the **TWINS** bumper stickers, all the kids wearing TC hats, the buzz and constant talking about the Twins." And of course, his favorite team was the - New York Yankees with Mickey Mantle his favorite player. Wait, what? Let him explain, "I became a Yankees fan as a threat to my dad that didn't work. I wanted to watch The Flintstones and told him if I couldn't, I'd be a Yankees fan. I learned at that time that one was supposed to hate the Yankees, so I thought he'd buckle under. He didn't, so I became a Yankees fan, which meant, of course, that [Mickey Mantle](#) became my favorite player. And I have remained a Flintstones fan. I think Wilma is hot." Thornley's favorite player on the hometown Twins was [Earl Battey](#).

He was the Minnesota Gophers bat boy when they won the Big Ten title under Coach Dick Siebert in 1968 and 1969. He still gets together with some of the Gopher players regularly. Thornley then played first base in high school as well as one year on the wrestling team.

Post high school, he attended Brown Institute in Minneapolis and earned a bachelor's degree, BS in

Management from the University of Minnesota. He has spent most of his life in the Twin Cities except for the mid-1970s when Thornley was a sportscaster/sports director at radio stations in DeSoto, Missouri and Sauk Centre, Minnesota.³ Since 1993, he has worked in communications for the Minnesota Department of Health. Stew also does free-lance writing and speaking.



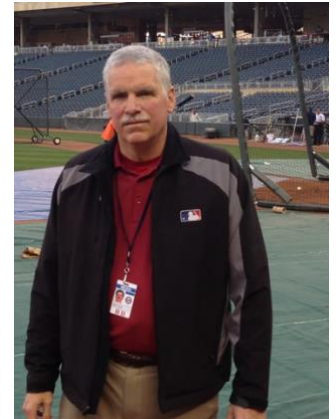
Stew met Brenda Himrich in 1988, "since I move so fast, we got married quickly - May 11, 1996." Brenda has a background as a chemist, completing her master's degree in industrial hygiene about the time they met. In 1995, she became the safety manager for bus and then light rail at Metro Transit and is now retired. Brenda also worked for Major League Baseball for six years, with different duties, including being a field timing coordinator. When asked for a picture for this article Thornley sent this crash dummy photo. Turns out he was Vince the Crash Test Dummy at the Metro Transit ROADEO when Brenda was the Metro Transit safety manager.

Since 2007, Thornley has been Major League Baseball's official scorer for the Twins games. He started official scoring at the college level in the early 1980s. Then in 1998, he started doing the Gameday datacasting at the Metrodome, continuing when MLB took control in 2001. So, when they needed another official scorer in Minnesota, "I was in the right place at the right time." Although Stew is mainly scoring, he still does some

¹ Stewart is a middle name through four Thornley generations. He and his grandfather used the middle name. He eventually had the first name legally removed because it was a hassle having a first name not used.

² Later Marshall-University.

³ 2021 populations, Desoto, MO - 6,435 and Sauk Centre, MN - 4,599.



Gameday stuff and field timing (pitch clock). Besides doing games in Target Field, he is also their official scorer during spring training, wisely escaping Minnesota's winters. And he went with the Twins to Puerto Rico in 2018 to score Minnesota's two home games there versus Cleveland, a year after being named the official scorer for the World Baseball Classic in Guadalajara. Stew is also a member of MLB's Official Scoring Advisory Committee that works with MLB, running meetings for the scorers and providing them assistance in various ways. "I wrote the case book that MLB developed as a supplement to the official playing rules."

When it's that other half of the year, not baseball season, he does different stat related work, including official scoring for the Minnesota Timberwolves, scoreboard, shot clock, hockey penalty timekeeping, etc. for the Minnesota Gophers, and other colleges and high schools in the Twin Cities. Thornley has been a public-address announcer since 1975 doing a variety of sports, mostly basketball, baseball, and football, for different high schools and colleges, and filling in behind the mic for the Gophers since 1994.

When did Stew join SABR? "I learned about SABR from an article in *Sports Illustrated* in 1979 and immediately joined and started doing baseball research and writing." He started working on a book about the Minneapolis Millers in the early 1980s that was published in 1988, [On to Nicollet: The Glory and Fame of the Minneapolis Millers](#). Plus Stew has written more since, "I've written about six other books on local baseball," including, [Metropolitan Stadium: Memorable Games at Minnesota's Diamond on the Prairie \(Home Diamonds\)](#), [Minnesota Twins Baseball: Hardball History on the Prairie](#), [The St. Paul Saints: Baseball in the Capital City](#), [Baseball in Minnesota: The Definitive History](#), [Holy Cow! the Life and Times of Halsey Hall](#), and [Historic Ballparks of the Twin Cities](#). Thornley continued, "I've written about 20 adult books, not those kinds of 'adult books', mostly about Minnesota baseball history, although I did a book about the Polo Grounds and one about the gravesites of notable Minnesotans."⁴ And there is more, "I've written about 25 books for young readers, mostly sports biographies, although I co-authored a science book with Brenda Himrich before we were married."

When asked what he is currently working on, he replied, "Whatever comes along and grabs my interest."

Stew has attended many SABR conventions and other events over the years and mentioned, "all have been great." He's looking forward to the National Convention coming to the Twin Cities next August, the third they have hosted. Thornley is very active and a leader in the Halsey Hall Chapter. He gave back to the organization as well serving as SABR's vice president on the board of directors from 2002 to 2004.

What does a class clown do when no longer a student? Get attention in different ways. Thornley related, "I held up a Twins-White Sox game at Met Stadium in 1977 by climbing the foul pole. Alcohol may have been involved." And using the experience gained in one year of high school wrestling, Stew wrestled Victor the Bear at sportsman's shows. He needed more experience, "My lifetime record against Victor is 0-3." Then there are pranks, "When the Orioles were in town in 1986, I called a local radio station and said I was [Cal Ripken](#). They believed me and put me on the air. I still have a recording of it." [That should be featured at SABR 52 next year.]



With Joey Chestnut May 2019

There are other feats that Thornley is proud of, too. In his words, "I once spent an entire Saturday at Old Country Buffet, getting three meals for the price of one." And we often discuss how baseball fandom develops around age 12. Stew has an accomplishment most boys that age would admire, "I have whizzed next and/or vice versa to nine Baseball Hall of Famers. [Bob Feller](#), at Lou Boudreau's funeral in 2001, was the first."⁵

Of course, when asked why he uses a mobility scooter or cane when walking, Stew had a unique reply. "I took up skydiving when I was in college but didn't stick with it then because it was too time consuming. More than 30 years later, I took it up again - until June 4, 2011, when I screwed up my landing, came down hard, and broke a vertebra. But that's not why I walk funny today. Three years later I had a malignant tumor in my hip. They got the whole thing out with a pick and a shovel, so I never had to do chemo. If I'm going to vomit from something, it should be from excessive drinking, as God intended, or by trying to eat an entire

⁴ [Six Feet Under: A Graveyard Guide to Minnesota](#)

⁵ The other eight include [Don Sutton](#), [Trevor Hoffman](#), [Jack Morris](#), [Bert Blyleven](#), [Tony Oliva](#), [Jim Kaat](#), [Jim Palmer](#), and [Paul Molitor](#). Also: [Vin Scully](#).

Crave Case of White Castle sliders, which I once tried to do but instead had a reversal of fortune after the 23rd one. I ended up with a bum leg instead, which is a good trade off because insurance paid for a cool mobility scooter for me. I also get great parking spaces with my handicapped tag.”

Asked for any final words of wisdom, Stew, the almost unofficial White Castle sliders champ, replied, “A life lesson I got directly from a true champion, hot-dog-eating champion Joey Chestnut: “You heave, you leave.”



Keltner Baseball Memories Team

Baseball Memories Team Holds Inaugural Event

By Larry Baldassaro

In partnership with the Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Association, the Ken Keltner chapter inaugurated its “Baseball Memories” program on October 17 at the Azura Assisted Living facility in Fox Point, WI. From 10:30 to 11:30 A.M., five volunteers (Mario Ziino, Sue Shemanske, Dennis Degenhardt, Gael Cullen and Larry Baldassaro) met with six residents of Azura, with the goal of enhancing their mood and communication skills by prompting conversations based on their baseball memories. We used sensory prompts to stimulate their memories, providing each participant with a baseball to hold during the session as well as a bat, baseball gloves and a 1982 World Series ring to pass around. After a couple of volunteers provided brief baseball memories of their own, we asked the participants to share their memories. One participant, a native of Ohio, spoke about his days as a catcher and shortstop for his high school team that won the state tournament, with the final game being played at Crosley Field, at that time the home of the Cincinnati Reds. Another spoke about attending games at then Miller Park, which was very close to her home.



At the “Seventh-Inning Stretch,” the participants sang along as we showed a video from a 1950s Ed Sullivan Show during which Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle and two other Yankees, together with the song’s composer, sang “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” We completed the session by showing a few slides featuring the famous Honus Wagner T206 baseball card and then providing each participant with a miniature replica.

Bridgette Bartlett, Quality of Life Director at Azura, provided invaluable assistance by agreeing to host the program, recruiting participants, setting up the meeting room, escorting the participants, and sitting in on the meeting. She also provided the volunteers with a positive review following the meeting.

A great debt of gratitude is owed to David Grams, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association. An enthusiastic supporter of “Baseball Memories, his support and advice throughout were essential to the planning and implementation of the program.

A second session is scheduled for November 14.



Earlier this year, March, we were approached by Jacob Sawyers, the Dementia Care Specialist for Walworth County about partnering with them to develop a Baseball Memories Program. I asked for volunteers to start working on a program and fortunately Larry Baldassaro stepped forward indicating he would be interest in helping because of his personal experience. Larry talked to Jacob, reached out to the SABR folks who have established programs and did further research. He organized a meeting with the SABR memories leaders at the convention that I also attended.

Returning to Milwaukee, Larry was more than interested, he was involved and met with the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association who was very interested. They started working on a possible site – but both organizations were tied up for the remainder on this year. Although hopeful for next year, he wanted to roll something out before then because he had some interested volunteers lined up. So, Larry decided to pay a visit to Azura cold and left some info behind. Nada. But he knew they were the place for us to start and stopped by ten days later to see if they had time to look at his information. The receptionist, remembering Larry and his idea got hold of Bridgette in her office. The letter was still on her desk, they met, she like the idea and asked, can we start in two weeks. Larry made it happen.

Wow – thank you Larry for your tenacity and dedication to helping others. With a great group of volunteers, including Mile Bauman who had a conflict, we have a heckuva start to the Keltner Baseball Memories Team. To learn more contact [Larry](#) or [Dennis](#).

DDD

Rest-in Peace - Pete Ladd

As we learned on October 21, former Milwaukee Brewer reliever, Pete Ladd passed away after a battle with cancer on October 20. Ladd, tossed into a difficult position when the 1982 World Series team need to replace the injured Rollie Fingers, he became one of the characters during that era of Brewer Baseball. My personal experience with Pete occurred during the 2005 Brewer Fantasy Camp when all of the coaches were from that World Series team including Pete, making his first appearance. He was so much fun to be around telling stories cracking jokes and with the biggest smile on his face the entire camp, even more than us campers, who were having the time of our life. Following is his [SABR Bio](#) from [Harvey's Wallbangers The 1982 Milwaukee Brewers](#).

Pete Ladd

This article was written by [Gordon J. Gattie](#)

Milwaukee fans anxiously awaited the outcome of rookie [Pete Ladd](#)'s duel with future Hall of Famer [Rod Carew](#). With one more out, the Brewers would earn the franchise's first trip to the World Series.

The 1982 American League Championship Series between the California Angels and Milwaukee Brewers was knotted at two games apiece. The Angels won the first two games at Anaheim Stadium, and the Brewers rallied back to win Games Three and Four at County Stadium in Milwaukee. As the unexpected late-innings replacement for injured closer [Rollie Fingers](#), the rookie right-hander Ladd had saved Game Three with two groundouts and two strikeouts to preserve Milwaukee's 5-3 margin, providing the Brewers an opportunity to fight another day.¹ Two nights later, in the ninth inning with two outs and pinch-runner [Rob Wilfong](#) representing the tying run on second base, Ladd faced Carew with the AL pennant hanging in the balance. In the on-deck circle stood another future Hall of Famer, Mr. October, [Reggie Jackson](#), who had struggled all series but was famous for his postseason home runs.

On a 1-and-2 count with 54,968 fans in hushed anticipation, Ladd fired a fastball across the plate. Carew hit a one-hop grounder directly at shortstop [Robin Yount](#), who threw a perfect strike to first baseman [Cecil Cooper](#) and the ensuing pennant-winning celebration began. After the game Ladd commented, "When I saw the umpire raise his arm, that's when I lost my mind."²

Peter Linwood Ladd was born on July 17, 1956, in Portland, Maine. His parents, William E. and Ruth Ladd, were high-school sweethearts who were married in 1941. Ladd spent his early childhood years in Portland, listening to the Boston Red Sox on his transistor radio. "I was like any kid who listened to the Red Sox a little bit past my bedtime," he commented in a post-career interview.³ His family moved to Atlanta when his parents were transferred there during his high-school years.⁴ Ladd graduated from Henderson High School in Atlanta, where former Yankees catcher [Jake Gibbs](#) recruited him to join the NCAA Division I ballclub at the University of Mississippi in Oxford.

Ladd pitched three seasons (1975-1977) at the University of Mississippi.⁵ Ole Miss finished the 1977 season with a 39-19 record, establishing the school record for most wins in a season.⁶ The 1977 Rebels were Southeastern Conference Champions, and advanced to the NCAA Southern Regional tournament in Miami, Florida. During the season, Ladd finished with a 4-3 record as the number-3 starter in the rotation. Ladd took the loss during the Rebels' 5-2 defeat to Miami (Florida), the game that ended the Rebels' tournament participation.⁷ A starting pitcher while playing at Ole Miss, he compiled a 10-7 record during his collegiate career and attained a 1.74 ERA as a sophomore.⁸

In June 1977 the 6-foot-3 Ladd was drafted in the 25th round of the free-agent draft by the Red Sox. The 20-year-old Ladd made his professional debut with the Winter Haven Red Sox of the Class A Florida State League. He finished the season with a 4-1 record, 5 saves, 27 strikeouts in 27 innings, and a 1.67 ERA as he transitioned from a starting pitcher to a reliever. Ladd returned to Winter Haven the next year for a full season, and led the league with 18 saves.



In 1979 Ladd was promoted to the Double-A Bristol (Connecticut) Red Sox, who won the 1978 Eastern League title despite finishing third during the regular season.⁹ Ladd joined future major leaguers **Wade Boggs**, **Bruce Hurst**, and **Mike Smithson** on the talent-laden roster. People took notice of his hulking frame and 15EEE shoe size; as one sportswriter commented, “His appearance is intimidating. He’s burly and he peers down at the batter through glasses that look to be too small for him. His mustache and whiskers are reddish brown. He brings his head with a snapping arm and the big body behind it.”¹⁰ Ladd’s large shoes also provided fodder for the “Big Foot” nickname that followed him throughout his career. The intimidating reliever had compiled a 3-1 record with 9 saves and a microscopic 0.62 ERA over 29 innings when he was traded to the Houston Astros with a player to be named and cash for **Bob Watson** on June 13.¹¹ After the trade announcement, Bristol’s manager, **Tony Torchia**, complimented Ladd on his future prospects: “Houston knew what it was doing when it grabbed Peter Ladd. He’s an outstanding prospect, definitely a big leaguer. He’s got an overpowering fastball.”¹² Ladd reported to the Columbus (Georgia) of the Double-A Southern League. Though he continued pitching in relief, he won two games and saved four others in his first six appearances,¹³ Ladd also started four games — the first games he started since pitching at Ole Miss — which included the only shutout he recorded in professional baseball.

In August, when Columbus teammate and fellow Mainer **Bert Roberge** was injured while pitching for the parent club, the 23-year-old Ladd received his call to big leagues. The Astros were leading the NL West Division, ahead of the Cincinnati Reds, and Ladd immediately jumped into a pennant race. On August 17 the Astros were trailing the Philadelphia Phillies 5-2 going into the ninth inning when manager **Bill Virdon** summoned Ladd from the bullpen.¹⁴ The first batter Ladd faced, **Bake McBride**, lined out to center field. Then **Pete Rose** grounded out, **Mike Schmidt** walked, and **Greg Luzinski** flied out as Ladd didn’t allow a run against the heart of Philadelphia’s order. He threw two scoreless innings four days later against the New York Mets. The reliever won his first major-league game on August 26 when he pitched the seventh and eighth innings of an Astros late-inning victory against the Phillies. Ladd finished his first big-league season with a 1-1 record and 2.92 ERA in 10 appearances totaling 12½ innings. Houston faltered down the stretch, while Cincinnati surged ahead and won the NL West title by 1½ games.

Ladd returned to the minor leagues the following April, splitting time between Columbus and the Triple-A Tucson Toros (Pacific Coast League). Over the next two seasons, Ladd pitched well but couldn’t crack the Astros’ star-studded staff. The Astros compiled the best NL team ERA during the 1980 and 1981 seasons, with a starting rotation anchored by **Joe Niekro**, **Nolan Ryan**, and **Vern Ruhle**, complemented by a powerful 1-2 bullpen punch in **Dave Smith** and **Joe Sambito**. In 1980 the unheralded Ladd went 6-5 with 5 saves and a 3.44 ERA at Columbus before his July promotion to Tucson.¹⁵ With his fastball and intimidating presence, he tied a Tucson team record by striking out five consecutive batters against the Ogden Athletics.¹⁶ Both Ladd and Roberge returned to the Toros for the 1981 season.¹⁷ By now, Ladd was fiercely intimidating and nurtured the image; he entered a 1981 exhibition game in the ninth inning with the go-ahead run on third base and missed the strike zone on all six warm-up pitches, then commented after the game, “A big part of my game is intimidation. I get the catcher going all over the place. Then when I get ’em in a situation, I’ll do my real warm-ups. I’m not out there for no purpose.”¹⁸

His intimidating image was useful for other reasons. During the offseasons, Ladd worked as a probation and parole officer at the Cumberland County Jail in Portland, Maine. Working as a parole officer provided a unique perspective to playing baseball, providing extra motivation to earn a spot on a major-league roster.

On October 23, 1981, Ladd was traded from Houston to Milwaukee for pitcher **Rickey Keeton**.¹⁹ The Brewers assigned Ladd to their Triple-A affiliate, the PCL’s Vancouver Canadians. The 25-year-old Ladd was now with his third organization though the Brewers didn’t have nearly as much pitching depth as the Astros. As the 1982 season approached, *Baseball Digest* placed Milwaukee in the middle of the AL East Division with an outlook of “better pitching could move up” based on “great power, good bullpen, fair defense, balanced starting staff, and some speed.”²⁰ Although Ladd was a welcome addition to the Canadians’ bullpen, he wasn’t mentioned in either *Baseball Digest*’s rookie report, which listed pitchers **Frank DiPino**, **Charles Porter**, **Willie Mueller**, and **Rich Olsen**,²¹ or in a later local interview that focused on Vancouver’s starting rotation.²²

As the 1982 All-Star break approached, the 48-35 Milwaukee Brewers stood atop the AL East, slightly ahead of Boston. After Milwaukee’s staff ace, **Pete Vuckovich**, and reliever **Jamie Easterly** were placed on the disabled list, Ladd received his second call-up to the majors.²³ He had compiled a 10-2 record with 8 saves and a 2.91 ERA for Vancouver. On July 17 Ladd celebrated his 26th birthday by debuting in the AL and pitching 1⅓ scoreless innings and getting the win against the Chicago White Sox in front of more 52,000 spectators in

Milwaukee. **Harvey Kuenn**, Milwaukee's manager, said of Ladd's performance, "He did an outstanding job. He came in and did everything they told us he could do." Ladd said, "Being my birthday and one of the largest crowds here, you could feel the tension. That was nice. I don't get nervous. I was very excited. More excited than when I was first called up with Houston."²⁴ Ladd credited **Eli Grba**, Vancouver's pitching coach, and adviser **Pat Dobson** with improving the consistency of his slider, which helped him return to the majors.²⁵

Ladd earned his first career save on August 20 when he entered in the ninth inning of a 6-4 contest against the Seattle Mariners, with no outs and runners on first and third. Ladd struck out **Dave Revering** looking, then **Rick Sweet** delivered a sacrifice fly to bring Seattle within a run. **Manny Castillo** flied out to end the game as Ladd preserved the victory.²⁶ His first blown save occurred when he allowed three runs against the Oakland Athletics on August 28 after not pitching for over a week.²⁷

Ladd's importance to Milwaukee's playoff dreams would quickly change. During the first game of a September 2 doubleheader, when Rollie Fingers exited the ninth inning of a 2-1 matchup against the Cleveland Indians with an 0-and-2 count on **Andre Thornton**, Ladd entered the game without warming up and struck out Thornton on a sinking fastball, then struck out **Von Hayes**, ending the game.²⁸ That game turned out to be Fingers' last appearance of the 1982 season; he had suffered a muscle tear in his right arm. Ladd inherited closer duties for the September stretch run and playoffs. Fingers complimented Ladd's response: "That was outstanding. If he can handle that kind of pressure, he can handle anything."²⁹

Though Ladd struggled in his new role during the month, Milwaukee successfully fended off the Baltimore Orioles, who compiled a 22-10 record starting September 1, coming from five games behind to pulling even with the Brewers on October 2 for Game 162, which Milwaukee won, 10-2, to clinch the AL East title.³⁰

The ALCS pitted two teams each seeking their first pennant. The California Angels, who started play in 1961, had reached the playoffs only once before — in 1979, when they lost in four games to the Orioles. The Brewers, who started play in 1969, also played in one postseason — in 1981, when they lost the AL Division Series to the Yankees in five games. California won Game One, 8-3, in which Ladd pitched a scoreless eighth inning, striking out all three Angels hitters he faced. California won Game Two, 4-2, and the Brewers now had their backs to the wall. The Brewers rebounded in Game Three. They built a 5-0 lead behind **Don Sutton**'s seven shutout innings. However, Sutton experienced trouble in the eighth inning as a home run and consecutive doubles by the Angels made it 5-3. Ladd relieved Sutton and induced a groundout to end the threat. In the ninth inning, Ladd needed 11 pitches to retire California on a groundout and two swinging strikeouts to the end the game. When asked by reporters if he ever faced a more challenging situation, Ladd drew upon his law-enforcement experience and responded, "Yeah, I got punched by a triple murderer this year."³¹ Milwaukee evened the series by winning Game Four, though Ladd didn't appear. Ladd was unstoppable in the deciding game: He replaced Milwaukee starter **Bob McClure** in the ninth with no outs and the tying run on first base. After **Bob Boone** sacrificed Wilfong to second base, **Brian Downing** and Carew grounded out to end the series. Ladd delivered on expectations; he saved two games, pitched to 10 batters and retired all 10, striking out five. He was the runner-up to **Darrell Porter** in the voting for the Championship Series MVP.

Ladd pitched in only one game of the seven-game World Series against the St. Louis Cardinals. He entered Game Two in St. Louis in the bottom of the eighth inning with the score tied, runners on first and second, and **Lonnie Smith** at the plate. He walked Smith on a questionable 3-and-2 call to load the bases and then walked **Steve Braun** on four pitches to force in the winning run.³² After Game Two, Kuenn relied on McClure as his closer throughout the Series while awaiting Fingers' potential return that never materialized.³³ St. Louis won the Series in seven games.

As Milwaukee prepared to defend its AL pennant in 1983, the Brewers' toughest question centered on Fingers' status; versatile Milwaukee pitcher **Jim Slaton** noted, "I'm not sure how (Fingers' situation) will influence me because we have Pete Ladd who specializes in short relief."³⁴ Throughout spring training, Ladd was slated to serve as the number-two short reliever behind Fingers. Even as the regular season approached, Fingers' status was unclear, which left the relievers' roles up in the air.³⁵ Milwaukee's fortunes dimmed when reigning AL Cy Young Award winner Vuckovich developed a torn rotator cuff that kept him from pitching until late August.³⁶ Fingers didn't return in time for the regular season, and Kuenn named Ladd as the closer. Confident in his abilities, Ladd commented, "I'm not trying to be Rollie Fingers. I'm just trying to make a name for myself. Time and again I've said it, I'm not Rollie Fingers' replacement."³⁷ In Ladd's first two games, he kept his opponents off the scoreboard, and then he absorbed two losses in late April. His ineffectiveness continued into early May and he apparently lost the good technical habits he had developed.³⁸ After going 0-2 with a 7.11 ERA in eight appearances, Ladd was sent down to Vancouver to focus on regaining his skills.³⁹ At Vancouver,

he quickly bounced back, was recalled on June 21, and returned to the closer role.⁴⁰ Ladd didn't allow a hit or run during his first four return appearances, and on July 18 he earned saves in both ends of a doubleheader against the Texas Rangers. Ladd pitched effectively for the rest of the season, with 23 saves and a 1.88 ERA after he returned from Vancouver. He finished fifth in the AL with 25 saves as Fingers was on the shelf all year. Milwaukee dropped to fifth place in the AL East with an 87-75 record, 11 games behind Baltimore. Recognizing Ladd's effectiveness, the Brewers selected him as their Most Valuable Pitcher for the 1983 season.

Fingers returned for the 1984 season, and Ladd returned to the number-two spot, where he established career highs with 54 appearances, 91 innings, and 75 strikeouts. His 4-9 record, 3 saves, and 5.24 ERA reflected the Brewers' difficult season, as they slipped to last place in the AL East. "It was a bad, long dream. I don't want to think about this season," Ladd commented after the season.⁴¹ He made his sole career start that season, on June 4, when no starting pitchers were available after three starters were injured in successive days; Ladd volunteered to start the game, and manager Rene Lachemann agreed.⁴² Ladd pitched four innings against the Orioles in Baltimore, and allowed five earned runs while taking the loss.⁴³ Off the field, Ladd was recognized for his sportsmanship, character, and community involvement as the Milwaukee Brewers' nomination for the Roberto Clemente Award.⁴⁴

Neither Ladd nor the Brewers fared much better in 1985. After enduring a tough season, Ladd wasn't guaranteed a roster spot heading into spring training,⁴⁵ and he had to prove himself to a new coaching staff. Throughout spring training, he worked on his delivery and also took a different approach to camp. With his trademark determination, Ladd commented, "I had to come here and do everything all over again and let them know last year was a fluke and that I could help this ballclub."⁴⁶ After posting a 1.50 ERA in spring training, he was one of 10 Milwaukee pitchers when the season started.⁴⁷

Ladd finished the season without a decision, two saves, and a 4.53 ERA in 45²/₃ innings, while Milwaukee ended the year sixth in the AL East with a 71-90 record. He pitched well during the first half of the season, with a 3.41 ERA in 29 innings, though his strikeout rate fell noticeably from the previous year and his batting average against was .322. He struggled throughout July, and was sent down to Vancouver in August. Ladd returned to the Brewers in September, but he endured his worst month that season. In November, per request to Milwaukee general manager **Harry Dalton**, he was designated for assignment and later released by the Brewers.

On January 18, 1986, Ladd found new life when he signed as a free agent with the Seattle Mariners. They had struggled in the AL West's second division since their inception in 1977, and were rebuilding their bullpen. At the end of spring training, Ladd was sent to Seattle's Triple-A farm club in Calgary, but was quickly recalled when reliever **Karl Best** was placed on the disabled list. Ladd started the season in the closer's role, earning three relief wins and four saves through late May, but was eventually replaced by **Matt Young**, who was converted from a starter to reliever. Ladd stayed with Seattle all season, pitching consistently and effectively, and enjoyed his best season since 1983.

He pitched in his last major-league game on October 3, 1986, against Cleveland, when he struck out **Cory Snyder**, the only batter he faced after relieving starter **Mike Morgan** in the seventh inning. Just before Ladd entered the game, Morgan allowed a run-scoring double that reduced Seattle's lead to 5-3. Immediately after Ladd left the game, reliever **Ed Nunez** gave up a game-tying two-run homer. As he had done so many times throughout his career, the burly reliever quietly and effectively did his job.

Ladd finished second on the Mariners with six saves, second with 52 appearances, and tied for second with a 3.82 ERA. He won a career-high eight games; his 70²/₃ innings pitched and 53 strikeouts were the second-highest totals in his career. The following January, Ladd signed a one-year deal with Seattle, but at the end of spring training he was released. Two weeks later, Ladd signed with the Los Angeles Dodgers as a free agent. He spent the entire season with the Albuquerque Dukes, the Dodgers' Triple-A affiliate. Experiencing arm trouble throughout the season, Ladd had shoulder surgery during the offseason.

Adding to his aura of determination, Ladd wasn't finished playing baseball when the 1987 season ended. In February 1988, Ladd's agent contacted every major-league club to land his services. When none responded with an offer, Ladd purchased a full-page advertisement in *USA Today* with the catch phrase, "Have Fastball Will Travel."⁴⁸ The ad didn't help him land a spot on a big-league roster.

In 205 appearances over six major-league seasons, Ladd compiled a 17-23 record with 39 saves and a 4.14 ERA. He struck out 209 batters in 287 innings, and had a 2.18 strikeout-to-walk ratio. In addition to his major-league time, Ladd pitched for parts of nine seasons in the minor leagues. Throughout his career, he was known

for his determination as much as his stature.⁴⁹ Ladd was inducted into the Maine Baseball Hall of Fame in 2009.⁵⁰

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Rest-in Peace – Frank “Hondo” Thomas

We lost another member of the Brewer’s family with Wisconsin ties in October, Frank “Hondo” Howard. Hondo’s first minor league season was with the Green Bay Bluejays where he met his wife and lived in the offseason until the late 1980. Frank and Carol raise six children there as well. Plus, he coached twice for Milwaukee. Jr Radcliffe had an excellent article that not only covers his career but his time in the Badger state you can read [here](#).

Following is [Thomas’s SABR Bio](#) by Mark Armour.

Frank Howard

This article was written by [Mark Armour](#)

He was not the first man to be recognized as a threat to break [Babe Ruth](#)’s record of 60 home runs in a season, but Frank Howard was surely one of the first to draw such attention while still in the minor leagues, or even in college. This gentle, humble man would be no match for Ruth in personality nor, it would turn out, in ability. Howard got a relatively late start on his professional career, and took several additional years struggling to reach the heights baseball observers had predicted for him. But in the end, he became an All-Star, a home run champion, a World Series hero, and one of the game’s most feared, and most admired, sluggers.

Frank Oliver Howard was born on August 8, 1936, in Columbus, Ohio, to John and Erma Howard. John was a large man (6-foot-4, over 200 pounds) and a machinist for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in Columbus, while Erma was a homemaker. Frank was the third of six children who lived with their parents in a modest frame house. “There was always lots of food on the table,” Howard remembered, “but if we kids wanted money, we had to earn it.” Frank shined shoes, caddied, and did the hard manual labor befitting his size. “When I was 14,” he recalled, “I worked a hundred-pound jackhammer in the streets for the city of Columbus, got paid maybe a dollar and a half an hour and was glad to get it.”¹ By the middle of his tenure at Columbus South High School, he had grown to 6-foot-5, 195 pounds.

John Howard had played semipro baseball around Columbus, and encouraged his son’s interest in the game. Despite his size, Frank had no interest in football, but he played both basketball (at which he excelled) and baseball (which he preferred). Howard was good enough to be widely recruited to play college basketball, but he decided to stay at home and play at Ohio State. “Frank was anxious to get an education,” recalled Floyd Stahl, his basketball coach at OSU, “but he had almost no money. We didn’t have the grants-in-aid and the sports scholarships that we have today. I told Frank I thought we could find jobs for him.” Howard did get some assistance from the school, but also worked around campus for four years. When Stahl got him a job working on a cement crew, the foreman told him, “Frank does twice as much work as any laborer I’ve had.”² Stahl was soon concerned that Howard would work too hard and overtrain. Howard became a basketball star for the Buckeyes, earning All-American honors as a junior, and setting a Madison Square Garden record in a holiday tournament with 32 rebounds in a game, and 75 for the three games.³ The next year Howard was drafted by the Philadelphia Warriors of the NBA.



He also played baseball for Ohio State, eclipsing the .300 mark in two seasons and displaying occasional glimpses of the power for which he would become known. The Brooklyn Dodgers first scouted him in 1956, and the next year, when Howard was a junior, Cliff Alexander filed a telling report: “Good arm. Fielding below average. Hitting below average (good potential). Running speed slightly below average. *Major league power. Definite follow.*” What Alexander saw was an unfinished product, with a lot of potential. Howard played that summer of 1957 for Rapid City in the Basin League, a circuit that drew a lot of attention from big-league scouts. He almost signed that summer, but had promised Stahl he would return to Columbus for his final year of basketball.⁴

After his basketball season ended, he let major-league scouts know that he was ready to sign. He had a lot of offers, but the Dodgers (now in Los Angeles) had been talking to him for a couple of years and he never seriously considered anyone else. Alexander remembers Howard calling him up to tell him that [Paul Richards](#), who was running the Baltimore Orioles at the time, had offered a \$120,000 bonus. Howard asked Alexander for \$108,000—\$100,000 for himself, and \$8,000 to be put toward a new house for his parents. Alexander agreed, and Howard was on his way.⁵ He left Ohio State one semester short of a degree in physical education.

The Dodgers sent their big recruit to their Green Bay team in the Class-B Three-I League, where he played for former Brooklyn star outfielder [Pete Reiser](#). This first stop proved no difficulty at all, as Howard hit .333 and led the league with 37 home runs and 119 RBIs. At the end of the year he was named the league’s Most Valuable Player. One evening at a local pizza parlor he met Carol Johanski, a secretary for the *Green Bay Gazette*. Six months later they married, and Howard soon bought a house in Green Bay and settled there.

In September the 22-year-old was brought up to Los Angeles to finish the season. He made his debut on September 10, 1958, at Philadelphia’s [Connie Mack Stadium](#). Batting against [Robin Roberts](#), he finished 2-for-4, including a mammoth two-run home run in his second big-league at-bat. The drive hit a billboard atop the left-field roof, causing left-fielder [Harry Anderson](#) to say he was afraid the billboard was going to fall over onto his head.⁶ On the 16th, he came to bat in Cincinnati with teammate [Duke Snider](#) on third base. Up in the radio booth, Dodgers announcer [Vin Scully](#) commented wryly that Snider was standing way off the foul line in deference to Howard’s propensity for pulling line drives down the line. Just as Scully said this, Howard hit a vicious foul liner that hit Snider in the head, knocking him briefly unconscious and ending the Duke’s season.⁷ Howard finished his brief trial hitting .241 in 29 at-bats.

In 1959 the Dodgers sent Howard to Victoria of the Texas League, which also proved to be no challenge. Through 63 games he looked to be on his way to a Triple Crown, with 27 home runs, 79 RBIs, and a .371 average. Dodgers GM [Buzzie Bavasi](#) paid the club a visit, watched Howard hit a 520-foot homer to win a game, and brought him back to Los Angeles. Howard only stayed a week, going just 2-for-19 before getting sent to Spokane (Triple-A Pacific Coast League). He hit .317 with 16 more home runs with Spokane in the second half, then returned to the Dodgers in mid-September. The club was in the middle of a pennant race so Howard only got two at-bats, including a pinch-hit home run off the Cardinals’ [Lindy McDaniel](#) on the 23rd. The Dodgers ultimately won the pennant and the World Series. After the season *The Sporting News* named Howard their Minor League Player of the Year.

By the spring of 1960, with 50 big league at-bats to his credit, Howard’s size, strength, and power had already led to a fair bit of commentary. Tales of 500-foot minor-league home runs, and his line drives that threatened base runners and infielders, were told repeatedly. In a day when many major leaguers were not even six feet tall, and when the biggest stars in the National League—[Willie Mays](#), [Hank Aaron](#), [Ernie Banks](#), [Frank Robinson](#)—were no more than 180 pounds, Howard had reached 6-foot-8, and was a full 250 pounds. In later years he would occasionally be heavier. [Jim Gilliam](#), Howard’s 5-foot-10 teammate, spoke for many when he said, “a man that big should hit fifty homers every year—and I mean *every* year.”⁸ He was still a work in progress in the outfield and first base (a fine arm but slow to get moving), and he swung at way too many bad pitches. As one scribe noted, “Huge Frank has little comprehension of his own mammoth strike zone and but slight control over his all-or-nothing uppercut swing. Until he develops a modicum of finesse, Los Angeles will string along with its present quota of mere mortals.”⁹

As ballyhooed as Howard was, he still faced the task of landing a spot on a world championship team. He did fairly well in spring training in 1960 (.278 with two home runs), but had a minor run-in with manager [Walter Alston](#) about his lack of playing time and ended up back in Spokane to start the year. In 26 games there he hit .371, and returned to the Dodgers in May, this time to stay. He soon became the regular right fielder and, despite a late-season slump, ended up hitting .268 with 23 home runs. After the season he was named the National League Rookie of the Year.

His 1961 season began slowly because of a chipped bone in his thumb. Alston had intended to move him to first base, but the injury and recovery kept Howard out of the lineup early, and he ended up mainly platooning in right field, starting just 72 times. He actually hit better than his rookie year — .296 with 15 home runs in just 267 at-bats, but grew increasingly frustrated when he could not stay in the lineup.

After the 1961 season the Dodgers lost both of their first basemen, [Gil Hodges](#) and [Norm Larker](#), in the expansion draft, causing them to move [Ron Fairly](#) to first and open up more playing time for Howard. Although he still only started 123 games, he hit .296 with 31 home runs (seventh in the league) and 119 RBIs (fifth). He was still an undisciplined hitter, with 108 strikeouts and just 39 walks. The Dodgers were a great offensive team, finishing second in the league in runs while playing in the pitcher-friendly Dodger Stadium (in its first year), and won 102 games before falling to the Giants in a best-of-three playoff series to decide the pennant.

A big change for Howard came about in early 1963. “For years,” wrote *Sports Illustrated*, “he has tried to hit 90-mph pitches with 20/40 vision in his good eye and 20/60 in his left. He was second in the league in strikeouts last year, and his relations with fly balls were no better, particularly those appearing out of the L.A. smog. Last week Howard put on glasses and immediately whacked three home runs in four games.”¹⁰ Howard stayed hot for a while (.384 in April), but a bad slump (.167 in May, .194 in June) cost him his full-time job, as he alternated the rest of the season with [Wally Moon](#) in right field. He still managed 28 home runs (by far the most on the team) and a .273 batting average in 417 at-bats. Glasses or no, he set an all-time Dodgers record with 116 strikeouts at the plate. He wore glasses for the rest of his career.

Thanks mainly to their great pitching staff, the 1963 Dodgers returned to the World Series and swept the New York Yankees, who had won the Series the previous two seasons, in four straight game. Howard finished 3-for-10 in his three games, including two memorable shots. In the first game, facing [Whitey Ford](#), he crushed a fastball 460 feet to deep left-center field for the “longest double in the 41-year history of [Yankee Stadium](#),” reaching the fabled monuments that were on the playing field in that era. In the fourth game, in Dodger Stadium facing Ford again, he hit a slow curve 450 feet into the second deck in deep left field.¹¹

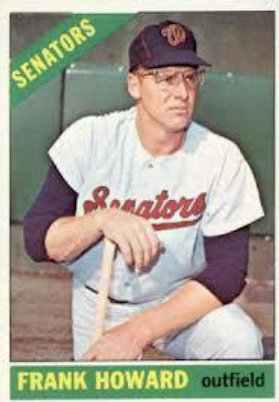
After the 1963 season Howard was 27 years old and people no longer believed he would turn into Babe Ruth. In his four years he had been on the field about two-thirds of the time for the Dodgers, and had hit .282 and averaged 24 home runs per year. While others had called him the new Ruth, and then came down on him when he was less than that, Howard had a more measured view. “I think I am a realistic guy,” he said. “I have the God-given talents of strength and leverage. I realize that I can never be a great ballplayer because a great ballplayer must be able to do five things well: run, field, throw, hit and hit with power. I am mediocre in four of those — but I *can* hit with power. I have a chance to be a good ballplayer. I work on my fielding all the time, but in the last two years I feel that I have gotten worse as a fielder. My greatest fear was being on the bases, and I still worry about it. I’m afraid to get picked off. I’m afraid to make a mistake on the bases, and I have made them again and again, but here I feel myself getting better.”¹² His throwing arm, once a strength, had been hurt when he shoved himself into a locker in a fit of anger.

Nonetheless, he wanted to know where he stood, and he went to see general manager Bavasi. “I didn’t go in and give it that old nonsense about play me or trade me, because the Dodgers have some mighty fine players,” said Howard. “I told Mr. Bavasi that these were my peak years as an athlete and that an athlete doesn’t get two or three sets of peak years. I wanted to play regularly, and Mr. Bavasi said I would get that chance this year. Manager Alston said it, too. Now it’s up to me.”¹³

Howard started the first 49 games of the 1964 season, but hit just .215 despite 14 home runs (second in the league to Willie Mays). At that point Alston began sitting Howard occasionally against right-handed pitchers, and he ended up with 433 at-bats, 24 home runs, and a .226 average. Alston and Bavasi had both come to believe that they could not win in Dodger Stadium with power; they needed pitching, defense, and speed. When Howard asked to be traded after the season, the Dodgers obliged. On December 4, they dealt Howard, third baseman [Ken McMullen](#), and pitchers [Phil Ortega](#) and [Pete Richert](#), to the Washington Senators for pitcher [Claude Osteen](#), infielder [John Kennedy](#), and \$100,000. Without Howard, and ably abetted by Osteen in the starting rotation, the Dodgers went on to win the 1965 World Series without a single player who hit more than 12 home runs. “Disappointed in the trade? Oh, no,” recalled Howard. “I knew it was time. I was at the stage of my life where I had to find out if I could play every day.”¹⁴

The Washington Senators were an expansion team with four years under their belt — they had lost at least 100 games every year, and had reached no higher than ninth place. No matter. Howard was excited about going where he was wanted, and excited to play for Gil Hodges, his teammate from a few years earlier. Howard

remained his own toughest critic, especially where his defense was concerned. “I’m not a complete player,” Howard admitted. “I can’t throw like a complete player should. And I don’t always hit the ball like I should. I do try, though.” Replied Gil Hodges: “Frank’s being paid to hit.”¹⁵ In 1965, Howard battled injuries all year, but played 149 games and hit .289 with 21 home runs and 84 RBIs, all team-leading figures. For the first time, he played mainly left field rather than right.



The next season his statistics were fairly similar (.278, 18, 71 in 146 games). In judging his record today, it is important to remember just how depressed run scoring was in the 1960s, especially in the American League. Although Howard was not a star, his OPS of .790 compared favorably to the AL’s .670. And he continued to make news, and add to his legend, with his long home runs — such as one he hit against the White Sox at D.C. Stadium in April. “[Tommy John](#) threw him something,” recalled teammate [Fred Valentine](#), “and he hit a line drive back at him. John fell off the mound trying to get out of the way of the ball. [[Center-fielder Tommie](#)] [Agee](#) started in like he was going to catch a line drive. It was like a 2-iron, and it ended up in the upper deck in centerfield. They painted another seat.”¹⁶ (The Senators had begun painting seats in the upper deck to represent some of Howard’s long home runs.)

Before the 1967 season, Hodges worked with Howard to retool his swing. He felt that Frank’s level swing was producing hard ground balls, and asked Frank to try a slight uppercut and to stand closer to the plate so he could pull the ball more.¹⁷ The results were obvious, as Howard had 24 home runs by midseason in 1967, and ended with 36 (third in the league) and a .256 average. He led the league with 155 strikeouts, and walked only 60 times, but his OPS of .849 was still eighth in the AL. It was his best season to date.

In 1968 Hodges moved to New York to manage the Mets, and was replaced by [Jim Lemon](#), a former outfielder for the old Washington Senators who had been an all-or-nothing slugger like Howard, hitting as many as 30 home runs and leading the AL in strikeouts three times. This year, 1968, is historically recognized as the Year of the Pitcher, as the AL hit .230 and had shutouts in 20 percent of its games. Bucking this trend, Howard took a step forward and became the hitter people had predicted he would become a decade earlier.

He hit .338 in April, but his best stretch came in early May when he collected 10 home runs and 17 RBIs in a span of six games. In so doing, he set records for home runs in four games (7), five games (8), and six games (10). Detroit pitcher [Joe Sparma](#), who gave up the eighth home run in this streak, said, “He always was good for 30 home runs anyway, but this year he’s clobbering my best pitches. I think he’ll hit 70.” “No,” contradicted teammate Jim Northrup, “he’ll hit 75.”¹⁸ As late as June 9, Howard held league leads in home runs (22), runs batted in (47), and batting average (.342). As the AL had had Triple Crown winners in each of the last two seasons (Frank Robinson and [Carl Yastrzemski](#)), Howard’s statistics were getting quite a bit of attention. As usual, the slugger himself was less impressed than the media. “All I’m trying to do is get three good cuts each time up. I haven’t changed my swing, and I don’t kid myself — I’m a streak hitter and I’m hot.”¹⁹

For the season, Howard settled down to hit .274, which was still 10th in the AL. He led the league with 44 home runs, 330 total bases, and a .552 slugging percentage, huge numbers for 1968, and finished second with 106 RBIs. He started his first All-Star Game, playing right field and batting fourth, going 0-for-2 in the AL’s 1-0 loss in the Astrodome. In August he turned 32, and people were writing like he had finally figured out how to hit. For the first time in his career, he also played quite a bit of first base, starting 51 times there. “Jim Lemon did a marvelous job with me,” Howard recalled. “He just took it a little further than Gil took it in ’67. He moved me a little closer to the plate, spread me out a little bit more, cut down on the overstride, and as a result, I was starting to get a little more selective at the plate, and probably had my first really good year in the big leagues.”²⁰

Howard had picked up the nickname “Hondo” early in his career, and it endured. Once he joined the Senators, and especially once he became a star, he picked up two more nicknames: the “Washington Monument” and “Capital Punisher.” The names played on his new environs along with his strength and formidable presence in the batter’s box, but both sobriquets belied his gentle nature. He was nice to everyone but pitchers.

After the Senators’ 10th-place finish, new owner [Bob Short](#) took over in January 1969 and decided to replace Lemon after his single season. To replace Lemon, Short lured [Ted Williams](#) out of his eight-year retirement, surprising everyone around the game. For Howard, this would be another turning point, perhaps the most important one. Williams believed he knew how to make Howard a better hitter. “He called me into his office

one day in the spring of '69," Howard recalled. "He said, 'Bush! Come on in here.' I'd only been in camp a couple of days, and I'm thinking, 'Gee, I'm not in his doghouse already, am I?'"

"Can you tell me how a guy who hit 44 home runs only got 48 walks?" asked Williams. After Howard offered some explanation, his manager got to the point. "Well, let me ask you. Can you take a strike? I'm talking about if it's a tough fastball in a tough zone, first pitch. Or if it's a breaking ball, you're sitting on a fastball ... Can you take a strike? You know, try to get yourself a little better count to hit in?" Howard said he could. "Well try it for me."²¹

In the event, Howard increased his walk total from 54 to 102, while his strikeouts fell from 141 to 96. He took advantage of more hitter's counts, and ended up hitting .296 with 48 home runs and 111 RBIs. He led the league with 330 total bases, and finished among the leaders in on-base-percentage (.402) and slugging percentage (.574). He hit a home run off [Steve Carlton](#) in the All-Star Game, held at his home park of RFK Stadium.

"I did it without even trying to walk," said Howard. "I was ready to hit, if it was my pitch, but if it was something other than I was looking for, I took it. I was laying off some bad pitches, getting more counts in my favor, and all because of Ted Williams. He's one in a million! A marvelous, marvelous, man!"²² One wonders what kind of career Howard might had if he had learned to do this 10 years earlier. People had been trying to get him to lay off bad pitches his entire career. Williams, with a very simple piece of advice, succeeded. Williams was impressed. "He *still* hit more home runs, some of them out of sight. I mean he *crushed* the ball. I think without question the biggest, strongest guy who ever played this game."²³ Williams had quite an influence on the rest of the team as well, as they finished in third place in the new six-team AL East with an 86-76 record. Williams was named the league's Manager of the Year.

The next year the team fell back to 70 wins and last place (losing their final 14 of the year), though Howard kept hitting. Playing 161 games in left field and first base, he led the AL in home runs (44), RBIs (126), and walks (132). Twenty-nine of his walks were intentional, as pitchers had begun to realize that they could no longer get him to chase bad pitches with runners on base. Indians manager [Al Dark](#) walked him intentionally 12 times in 18 games. His star pitcher, [Sam McDowell](#), was particularly afraid of Howard, who hit .368 with five home runs in 68 at-bats off McDowell in his career. It might have been worse; McDowell walked Howard 25 times, including nine times intentionally. Twice in 1970 Dark moved McDowell to another position with Howard due up, then moved him back to the mound when the coast was clear.

Although Howard had just had his three best seasons, he had turned 34 years old. He dropped back at bat in 1971, hitting .279 with 26 home runs, though his 83 walks helped him remain one of the league's most valuable offensive forces. His dropoff might have been aided by showing up in camp weighing 297 pounds. He worked hard in the spring to remove the weight, though it might have weakened him to start the season. The big story in Washington that season was the protracted public effort to find a local buyer for the team, a story that resolved itself late in the season when Short received permission from the American League to move the Senators to Arlington, Texas. In the team's last game, on September 30, 1971, Howard hit the final home run by a Washington Senator, though the game was ultimately forfeited to the Yankees when the angry fans stormed the field in the ninth inning. After Howard hit the home run, he received a standing ovation, and waved to the crowd from the dugout steps with tears in his eyes.²⁴ Major-league baseball did not return to Washington for 34 years.

Howard had become one of the higher-paid players in the game, reaching \$125,000 by 1970 and staying there for a few years. In early 1972, prior to reporting to the brand new Texas Rangers, he held out for a small raise but likely settled for maintaining his \$120,000 salary. He still lived in Green Bay, where he owned several shopping centers, but at least one scribe thought he ought to head to camp: "Considering the prevailing temperatures in Green Bay this time of year, it's a wonder Howard doesn't settle just to get warm."²⁵ After he did so, and after a brief player strike that spring, on April 21, 1972, Howard appropriately [hit a home run in his first home at-bat](#) for the Rangers, the first hit in Arlington Stadium, a long drive to dead center. "A guy just does the best he can," said Howard. "We're aware you can't peddle a poor product to the public. It's nice to think that these people's first memory of major league baseball might be my home run, but I really hope that their memory is the win."²⁶



It was not a harbinger, as Howard's days of stardom were behind him. He hit just .244 with nine home runs in 95 games before being sold to the Detroit Tigers on August 31. The Tigers were in a fight for the AL East title,

and acquired Howard to platoon at first base with [Norm Cash](#). Howard hit .242 for the month, but had one big day — a 3-for-4 performance against the Orioles on September 21 that included a home run off [Dave McNally](#). As the Tigers won the division by a half-game, Howard's contributions were important. Because he did not report to the Tigers until September 1, he was ineligible to play in the AL Championship Series against Oakland, which defeated Detroit in an agonizingly close five-game series.

The next season marked the advent of the designated hitter rule in the AL, a change tailor-made for the 36-year-old Howard — or the 26-year-old Howard, for that matter. He played 85 games for the Tigers, only three times in the field, and hit 12 home runs and batted .256. In October he drew his release, ending his major-league career. He signed for 1974 to play with the Taiheyo Lions of Japan's Pacific League, but he hurt his back in his very first at-bat, and never played again. Howard's playing career was over at age 37.

With his popularity, it is not surprising that Howard enjoyed an extensive post-playing career in the game. He managed the Spokane Indians in 1976, but returned to the major leagues as a coach with the Milwaukee Brewers the next and remained in the majors for most of the next 20 years. He had two brief trials as manager. He led the San Diego Padres in the strike-marred 1981 season, but was let go after the team finished last in both halves of the split season. Two years later he took over the New York Mets when [George Bamberger](#) was fired 46 games into the 1983 season, but Howard was not offered the job after the Mets finished last. Howard was well respected as a coach, but his employers seemed to feel that he was too nice a guy to be a successful manager. Besides the Brewers and the Mets, he also served as coach with the Seattle Mariners, the New York Yankees and the Tampa Bay Devil Rays.

After spending offseasons in Green Bay for many years, by the early 1990s Howard had resettled in Northern Virginia where his years of stardom in Washington made him a popular and revered figure. He and Carol raised six children, but their marriage later ended and in 1991 he remarried, and he and second wife Donna were still happily together in 2012. When the major leagues returned to Washington in 2005, with the relocation of the former Montreal Expos, Howard became the most visible link to the previous major-league teams that had played there. Especially in the Nationals years at RFK Stadium, Howard's old park, fans got a visible reminder of the old star anytime they looked at the painted seats, still visible in the upper deck. In 2008 the Nationals began play in the brand-new Nationals Park, and the next year unveiled three statues in their center field plaza, depicting [Walter Johnson](#) (who pitched for the first 20th-century version of the Washington Senators), [Josh Gibson](#) (who starred in the Negro Leagues for the Homestead Grays, who played in Griffith Stadium), and Howard (representing the expansion Senators). When the Nationals reached the postseason in 2012, Howard threw out the ceremonial pitch of the Division Series before Game Four.

The Nationals announced news of his death at the age of 87 on October 30, 2023.

Long after he had retired, Howard was often called upon to look at back on his career, especially the years prior to his stardom, and he always did so objectively. "To be totally honest, had I made some adjustments — hitting-wise — earlier in my career, instead of just going up there [swinging at everything], I would have had better years. When people look back on their careers, they say they wouldn't change a thing. I would have. I would have made the adjustments. I would have given myself the chance to put up big numbers."²⁷

But let us not dwell on what Frank Howard did not accomplish, and instead marvel at what he did: 382 home runs, two home run titles, an RBI title, a World Series home run and championship, three All-Star Games, and the admiration of most of greater Washington, D.C. The man has a statue outside of a big-league ballpark, an honor not bestowed on many players. For a few years there, a big-league pitcher would rather face just about anyone in the world instead of Frank Oliver Howard, the Capital Punisher.

Photo credits

Frank Howard with Washington Senators: Trading Card Database.

Frank Howard with Texas Rangers: SABR-Rucker Archive.

Notes

¹ John Devaney, "Frank Howard: Goliath Grows Up," *Sport*, September 1968: 65.

² William Leggett, "The Dodgers' Troubled Giant," *Sports Illustrated*, May 25, 1964.

³ Al Hirshberg, *Frank Howard—The Gentle Giant* (New York: Putnam, 1973), 22.

⁴ Ed Linn, "Frank Howard—The Man Behind the Babe Ruth Myth," *Sport*, April 1961: 61. The Cliff Alexander report is included in this article.

⁵ Mike Bryan, "Reflections on the Game," *Sports Illustrated*, May 25, 1989.

⁶ Ed Linn, "Frank Howard," 67.

- 7 John Schulian, "The Boys Of Summer Were The Boys Of Slumber The First Year In Los Angeles," *Sports Illustrated*, April 14, 1975.
- 8 Allan Roth, "Frank Howard's Baseball Diary," *Sport*, July 1960: 21.
- 9 "Los Angeles DODGERS," *Sports Illustrated*, April 11, 1960.
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- 11 William Leggett, "Koo-foo the Killer," *Sports Illustrated*, October 14, 1963.
- 12 William Leggett, "The Dodgers' Troubled Giant," *Sports Illustrated*, May 25, 1964.
- 13 Ibid.
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- 15 Mark Mulvoy, "Baseball's Week," *Sports Illustrated*, June 14, 1965.
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- 18 Peter Carry, "Highlight," *Sports Illustrated*, May 27, 1968.
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- 21 James R. Hartley, *Washington Senators*, 94.
- 22 James R. Hartley, *Washington Senators*, 105.
- 23 John Underwood, "Ted Williams—My Year," *Sports Illustrated*, January 26, 1970.
- 24 Don Oldenburg, "No Place Like Home," *Washington Post*, March 22, 2005: C1.
- 25 "People," *Sports Illustrated*, March 6, 1972.
- 26 Harold Peterson, "New Home on the Range," *Sports Illustrated*, May 1, 1972.
- 27 Bill Ladson, "Q&A with Frank Howard—Former Senators Slugger discusses career in Washington," Washington Nationals Website (<http://washington.nationals.mlb.com>), January 22, 2009.



2023 Wisconsin Born Players Making Their Debuts in the Show

We had three Wisconsin born players make their major league debuts this year. Two attended UW-La Crosse, two are pitchers and one made a dramatic start to his career in Game 160, earning an extra-inning win for his home state Brewers over the Chicago Cubs. Welcome to The Show Alec Marsh (Milwaukee), Taylor Kohlwey (Holmen), and Caleb Boushley (Hortonville).

This month we were going to feature the second player, Taylor Kohlwey's debut. Unfortunately, I was unable to finish the article, and we will cover Kohlwey and Boushley in December.



November Trivia By Rick Schabowski

Rick continues on a roll with some interesting and challenging World Series questions this month.

1. Name the team and the year that had the worst regular season record to appear in the World Series.
2. Who am I? I played in the 2023 World Series, and it was my first WS in fifteen years, the longest gap for a position player.
3. Name the three managers who have taken three different teams to the World Series?
4. Who was the first World Series MVP?
5. Who is the only World Series MVP from a losing team?



Do you have a baseball trivia question or two, to stump Our Stumper? If so, send your questions to [Rick](#) to see if you can trip him up and he'll include it in a future *Keltner Hot Corner* giving you credit - bragging rights - for your stumper(s).

Trivia Answers are [here](#)

Do you have a baseball story – everyone does!

We all have great baseball stories, often shared with family and friends for years. So, when will you share it with your SABR family? We all love stories and want you to share yours with all of us.

If you're ready to share yours, contact [Dennis](#).

Monthly Wisconsin Born Players SABR Bios

With the addition of the three new Wisconsin born major leaguers in 2023 there have been 257* total and 93 have SABB Bios written on them. To get to know these guys better, we will include a SABR Bio monthly starting from the oldest with a completed bio to the most recent. Yes, that will take at least eight years to complete, and longer as new bios are finished. If you are interested in seeing the entire list of these players, or there is a Wisconsin born player that interests you and needs a SABR Bio, contact [Dennis](#).

(*Includes J.P. Feyereisen who was born across the river in Minnesota because that was where his mom's doctor's birth hospital was located. She left Wisconsin for the birth and returned upon release.)

This month's Wisconsin bio is on Madison's Kid Nichols, the 1,453rd major leaguer and 20th from Wisconsin. He was also the first of our four ballplayers enshrined into the Hall of Fame, class of 1949.

Kid Nichols

This article was written by [Rich Bogovich](#)

Charles Augustus Nichols was born into a large family on September 14, 1869 in Madison, Wisconsin. His father was a butcher there for many years and briefly served as an alderman. For a few years before Charles was born, his half-brothers James and John were regulars for Madison's Capital City club, which was connected to the National Association of Base Ball Players.¹ After Charles arrived, the names of his brothers Will and George would also occasionally show up in newspaper articles about local baseball games, such as one during 1877 in which Will, about nineteen years old, was the winning pitcher.²

Around 1881, Charles and most of his siblings moved with their parents to Kansas City, Missouri. By 1885 he was playing on the amateur Blue Avenue club with Will, George, and a future brother-in-law. They were crowned as champions at least once with Charles in the pitcher's box.³ He also spent time with at least one other amateur club, Beaton's nine of nearby Armourdale, Kansas, and it was with them in 1887 when he reportedly came to the attention of the Kansas City Cowboys in the Western League as summer approached.⁴

June 14, 1887 was the date of his first pro game. Nichols ended up as the winning pitcher in a 7-6 outcome at Lincoln, Nebraska. It has been widely reported that Charles Nichols received the nickname "Kid" upon joining the club, when the older players either mistook him for a batboy or at least thought he looked more like one than he did a professional player. His weight at the time was estimated to be no more than 135 pounds.

Nichols made 29 more starts and finished the season with 18 wins. Oddly, the local management appeared to have little interest in resigning him, so he began the 1888 season in the Southern League with the Memphis Grays. He had a record of 11-8 when the league disbanded in June, and in July he started pitching for one of two minor league teams in Kansas City that year, the Western Association's Blues. He sparkled with a record of 16-2 and a league-leading ERA of 1.14.

Ownership in St. Joseph, Missouri, bought the Blues franchise but Nichols held out, insisting that he was free to sign elsewhere.⁵ He prevailed, and in 1889 eventually joined the Omaha team led by [Frank Selee](#). The Kid's record that season was 39-8.

Selee was hired to manage the NL's Boston Beaneaters for 1890 and wanted to take Nichols with him, but the Cincinnati Reds also claimed him, after Nichols reportedly rejected other offers from Chicago and St. Louis.⁶ In the midst of this offseason confusion, on January 29, 1890, he married to Jane Florence Curtin (who often went by Jennie). They honeymooned in Omaha and stopped in Madison on their way to the East Coast.

On April 23, Nichols made his major league debut at home against Brooklyn. Nichols was the winning pitcher, but he didn't make too much of an impression until facing [Amos Rusie](#) in New York on May 12 as a Players' League game was taking place in an adjacent field. The two pitchers gave up almost nothing for the first nine frames, and as the game proceeded through extra innings, many fans watching the adjacent game supposedly were instead trying to watch the drama unfolding in the NL's [Polo Grounds](#). The game ended in the thirteenth inning on a towering homer by slugger [Mike Tiernan](#) of the Giants off Nichols. This pitching duel was immediately put on a pedestal by journalists, and remains [one of the most-discussed battles of the National League's early decades](#).



Nichols finished his rookie season with 27 wins against 19 losses. Kid and Jennie Nichols wintered in Boston, and on December 8 they celebrated the birth of their only child, Alice. Nichols won 30 games for the first time in 1891, and would reach that total in six of the next seven seasons. His seven 30-win seasons remains a major league record.

In the process, he would help his team to three consecutive NL pennants, from 1891 to 1893. Baltimore then ran off their own streak of three pennants, and in 1897 the Beaneaters battled them down to the wire as the rough-and-tumble Orioles tried for a fourth straight title.

On September 21, Nichols suffered the worst inning of his major league career, yielding twelve runs to Brooklyn in the first inning of a 22-5 loss. Three days later, with a razor-thin lead of half a game, Boston began a three-game series in Baltimore with only three more games left in the season afterwards. Nichols shook off his recent humiliation and was the winning pitcher in a 6-4 contest to open the series. Baltimore rebounded the next day with a 6-3 win, and Selee again turned to Nichols for the third game. The Beaneaters broke open a tie game with a three-run fourth to give Nichols a lead of 8-5. Boston exploded for nine more in the seventh, and Nichols then cruised to a final score of 19-10.⁷ Though this game clearly wasn't anything like the many low-hit gems Nichols pitched throughout the season, half of Baltimore's runs came after the game was out of reach, and box scores indicated that only four or five of the ten runs were earned.

Though Boston had three more games to play, in Brooklyn, and Baltimore hosted Washington for four to end the season, many newspapers declared the pennant to have been won, for all practical purposes. They were right. For the season's remaining days and for quite awhile thereafter, Nichols seemed to have the most praise heaped upon him of any single Beaneater.

In 1898, Boston added a fifth pennant in Nichols' first eight years as a major leaguer, to strengthen their case as the decade's top team. For the *New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*, the author developed a formula for determining the effect that a player had on individual pennant races throughout his career. He wasn't surprised by the first and second rankings. "There were six pennant races that clearly would have ended differently if [Babe Ruth](#) had been merely a good player, and [Mickey Mantle](#) also had a decisive impact on six," James wrote. "However, while you might have guessed the numbers one and two men on the list, the number three man was a pitcher who had a decisive impact on the pennant races of 1891, 1892, 1892, 1897, and 1898, Kid Nichols. Nichols won [at least] 30 games in all of those seasons—for teams that won pennants by relatively thin margins."⁸

At first glance, Nichols record of 21-19 in 1899 stands out like a sore thumb compared to all of his previous seasons with Boston. On the other hand, his ERA of 2.99 was better than in three of his previous years, including the pennant-winning season of 1893 when he won 34 games. Boston's daily newspapers tended to write off his low winning percentages as simple misfortune.

In 1900, Nichols was hampered significantly for the first time in his career by an injury, suffered in late April,⁹ and he ended up with his first losing season as a pro, at 13-16. Still, his ERA of 3.07 was better than his 3.52 mark of the 1893 championship year and the next two seasons after that. The most notable difference in his performance was that his strikeouts dropped considerably from the previous season. Nichols rebounded somewhat in 1901, his final year with Boston, and finished with a record of 19-16.

Near the turn of the century Nichols spent the closing weeks of successive preseasons coaching collegiate players along the East Coast, at Amherst (1899), Yale (1900), and Brown (1901). He received an offer from Brown again for 1902, but in mid-December of 1901 a shakeup in the Western League provided Nichols an opportunity to co-own and manage that circuit's Kansas City club, which were known as the Blue Stockings under Nichols—while the Blues name shifted to a rival franchise across town in the newly formed American Association.

Nichols' squad fared better in its league's standings, but the AA club brought in opposing teams from much more populous cities and was apparently considered to offer fans higher quality play. Therefore, even though his club won the Western League pennant while the AA franchise barely had a winning season, the latter won the bitter battle of the box office by far.

Nevertheless, Nichols could derive considerable satisfaction not only as a manager but also as pitcher, proving that he wasn't washed up by winning 26 games on the mound and losing only 7 with an ERA of 1.82. His top rival for the league's pitching honors was [Mordecai Brown](#), who had one more win than Nick but also had 15 losses to go with an ERA of 2.22.

Nichols continued as player-manager in 1903, and with a week left in the season his Blue Stockings were in third place with had a record of 66-58. He wasn't pitching quite as well as in 1902 but remained a considerable asset with a record of 21-12 and an ERA of 2.51. However, as meager attendance continued in the Western League its season was abruptly cancelled because its franchises generally couldn't afford to play their final few games.¹⁰

In the end, the Western League surrendered Kansas City to the much more successful American Association, but Nichols ended up in a better situation for 1904 when a year-old rumor became reality, and he was named to manage the St. Louis Cardinals.

Kid Nichols took over a team that had finished dead last under [Patsy Donovan](#) in 1903, with a record of 43-94. After he pitched the Cards to victory on June 4 in his return to Boston, where fans greeted him warmly, his new team left town with a record of 18-18. Toward the end of the season Nichols had steered the Cardinals to a record of 75-73, but they lost their final games to finish 75-79, still a considerable improvement in one year. He fared even better as a pitcher, with a record of 21-13 and a career-best ERA of 2.02.

Though Nichols was widely held in high regard by teammates, opponents, and fans in other cities, and he didn't share most other players' fondness for alcohol,¹¹ he had experienced periodic contract disputes with Boston's owners and actually held out a few times. This strong will was apparently the cause of trouble for him early in the 1905 season. He got along well with only one of the Cardinals' co-owners, [Frank Robison](#), but as Robison's health declined in 1905 his brother Stanley exercised more control as the other co-owner.¹²

After accumulating a record of 5-9, on May 3rd [Stanley Robison](#) relieved Kid Nichols of his managerial duties, though he was retained as a pitcher. About two months later, after compiling a record of 1-5 with an ERA of 5.40, Nichols was unconditionally released. In short order he was signed by a former Boston teammate, [Hugh Duffy](#), who had become manager of the Phillies. The change of teams worked wonders for the second half of the season, and he rewarded Duffy's faith in him with an ERA of 2.27 to go with a record of 10-6. Nichols returned to the Phillies in 1906 but was suffering from pleurisy, a debilitating inflammation of the rib cage, and after four poor performances he retired.¹³

Kid Nichols won 361 games, lost only 208, and saved 17. He finished 95% of his career starts and was the youngest pitcher to reach 300 career victories.

By 1907, Nichols turned his attention to an activity that he had become very fond of more than a decade earlier, bowling. More often than not he would own or manage an alley or two for the rest of his life. Though he had no formal connection to professional baseball in 1907, at his bowling "academy" back in Kansas City he started presenting games on an electric scoreboard that used lights to depict action occurring elsewhere in the country (during an era before radio). On August 6 he even filed a federal patent application for his unique method of showing baserunners in motion.

Partway through the 1908 season, Nichols returned to professional baseball, in the state of his birth. In July he took over as manager of the woeful Oshkosh Indians in the Wisconsin-Illinois League. About a month into this stint his team played a 23-inning game in nearby Fond du Lac, which Oshkosh won, 4-2. Nichols guided Oshkosh to more wins than losses, 34 to 31. He put himself in 35 games during that half-season, but not many as a pitcher. His 3-1 record on the slab gave him career totals as a professional pitcher of 495 victories against 258 losses.

In 1909, Kid Nichols started playing semipro ball in Kansas City with [Johnny Kling](#), among others. Kling was holding out after helping the Cubs to consecutive World Series crowns. To taunt Chicago's ownership, the popular catcher took Nichols and the rest of "Johnny Kling's All-Stars" to play semipro teams in the Windy City that summer. They did very well in Chicago, but not in their last game, on September 11. They faced the famous African-American team known as the Leland Giants, formerly the Chicago Union Giants. The most prominent player in the Leland lineup was future Hall of Famer John Preston "[Pete](#)" [Hill](#). Kling's team scratched out only six hits, two by Nichols, who batted eighth ahead of pitcher [Chick Fraser](#). Nick scored the only run for his club in a 6-1 loss.¹⁴

Early in 1910, Nichols he had a conversation with a teenager across the street from where he lived, Charles (eventually "[Casey](#)") [Stengel](#). Stengel would go on to become a major league player but gained far more fame leading the Yankees to seven World Series titles in twelve years. He would consistently credit Nichols as one of his most important early influences.¹⁵

In 1911, Nichols led a baseball team in a game of some historical significance. A club from Keio University in Japan had spent three weeks playing collegiate teams in the U.S., and on May 12 they faced Nick's semipro team in Kansas City, augmented with players from other local squads, including one from Kling's. The Kansas City club, with Nick pitching, had the game in hand until Keio rallied for four runs in the eighth inning, on their way to a 7-6 victory.¹⁶

Kid Nichols reconnected with the major leagues that summer when he was hired by the Detroit Tigers to scout in the Texas League for a few months.

1913 was an eventful year for Nichols in several regards. On March 22 he and famous Cub [Joe Tinker](#) opened a movie and vaudeville house in Kansas City called the Diamond Theater.¹⁷ (It's unclear how long they both maintained an ownership stake in it.) On August 5, the federal government awarded Nick a patent for his "Amusement Apparatus," almost six years to the day of when he had applied for it. Also, his daughter Alice and her husband made him a grandfather.

In 1915 and 1916, Kid Nichols managed the Missouri Valley College baseball team. Otherwise, for the better part of a decade his only regular association with baseball resulted from announcements about the electronic scoreboard.

That changed late in the summer of 1922 when he was invited to Boston for an old-timers' game. He pitched the first two innings for one squad and [Cy Young](#) did so for the other. Sadly, Nick was bashed for seven runs in the first frame, though he managed to escape the second inning unscathed.

A decade later, Kid Nichols received recognition as a key figure helping to launch an expanded [Ban Johnson](#) League in the area, for amateur ballplayers under the age of 21.¹⁸ Nichols was drafted to train and coach the Franklin Ice Cream club in 1932. The enlarged league would produce many notable major leaguers, most prominently Mickey Mantle.

The next year, at the age of 63, Kid Nichols won the Kansas City bowling championship. Not much later, his beloved wife Jennie passed away.

Early in 1936, the inaugural class of the National Baseball Hall of Fame was announced, but Nichols suffered through years of barely registering in the voting. *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* explained the circumstances that contributed to this outcome. "Kid Nichols has been excluded from discussions about the greatest pitchers of all time, as much as anything, because of an accident of the calendar," James wrote. "Baseball exploded in popularity between 1905 and 1910, just as Nichols was leaving the game. Other things happened. Sports coverage by newspapers increased exponentially, and the wire services began to cover and report every game to a national audience. Nichols missed all that; his memory was pushed into baseball's medieval past almost before he got the clay out of his spikes."¹⁹

In 1939, shortly before turning 70, Kid Nichols had a chance to redeem himself in a second old-timers' game, again in Boston, a day after attending the All-Star game in New York. In a steady rain Nick pitched to five batters and finished his inning without allowing a run. A few years later, the first of his great grandchildren was born.

Sportswriters would periodically advocate for Nichols' election to the Hall of Fame, such as Grantland Rice,²⁰ and Nichols' contemporaries such as Cy Young were reportedly in his corner, but the biggest single boost to his consideration may have come in April of 1948 when a legend who was in many ways his exact opposite, [Ty Cobb](#), loudly and repeatedly clamored for Nichols to join him at Cooperstown.²¹

Nichols and the late Mordecai Brown were approved for membership early in 1949, and that June he was inducted into the Hall. For four years he was able to bask in that glow, until his death on April 11, 1953, at the age of 83.

Notes

¹ Sam Smith, "Nichols: 'We Stayed In and Pitched,'" *Baseball Digest*, June 1951, page 76. See also the *Record Book on the Games of the Capital Baseball Club, 1866-1869*, in the archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

² "Stoughton Scooped," *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison), June 30, 1877: 4.

³ Nichols' descendants still possess a commemorative bat with engraved gold and silver plates for an amateur championship won by the "Blue Avenue Base Ball Club."

⁴ Ernest Mehl, "Sporting Comment," *Kansas City Star*, September 14, 1950.

⁵ "Kid' Nichols an Old Timer," *St. Louis Republic*, May 17, 1903, Part IV, page 1.

⁶ "Diamond Stories," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 3, 1899: 13.

- 7** For a detailed account of this race, see Bill Felber, *A Game of Brawl: The Orioles, the Beaneaters and the Battle for the 1897 Pennant* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).
- 8** Bill James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* (New York: Free Press, 2001): 978.
- 9** W. S. Barnes, Jr., "Boston's Worst Defeat," *Boston Sunday Journal*, April 29, 1900, section 2, page 1.
- 10** A primary source for information about Nichols' stint leading the Kansas City Blue Stockings was Dennis Pajot, *Baseball's Heartland War, 1902-1903: The Western League and American Association Vie for Turf, Players and Profits* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2011).
- 11** "Will Urge Players to Stand Together," *St. Louis Republic*, December 19, 1901: 7.
- 12** Dick Farrington, "Kid Nichols, Holder of Two 'Hidden' Major Hill Marks, Still Making His Way Via 15 Hours a Day at Age of 73," *Sporting News*, December 31, 1942: 11.
- 13** Nichols explained this around 1949 in a handwritten autobiographical document that is in possession of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.
- 14** "Klings Lost the Last One," *Kansas City Star*, September 12, 1909: 12.
- 15** For example, see Casey Stengel, as told to Harry T. Paxton, *Casey at the Bat: The Story of My Life in Baseball* (New York: Random House, 1962): 58-59.
- 16** See these articles in the *Kansas City Star*: "Japs' Play Here Tomorrow," May 11, 1911: 11; "Kansas Beat Keio 10 to 8," May 12, 1911: 10; "Japs Use their 'Noodles,'" May 13, 1911: 13.
- 17** Advertisement, *Kansas City Star*, March 22, 1913: 4.
- 18** For example, see "Founders of Ban Johnson League See Idea Spreading over Nation," *Syracuse Herald* (New York), March 8, 1932: 15.
- 19** James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract*: 852.
- 20** For example, see Grantland Rice, "Spotlight," *Ellensburg Capital* (Washington), January 23, 1948: 2.
- 21** For example, see Robert Moore, "Ty Cobb Plugs Pitcher Nichols For Baseball's Hall Of Fame," *Florence Times* (Alabama), April 2, 1948: 9

**Schabowski Super Stumpers
November Answers:**

1. 1973 New York Mets 82-79
2. Evan Longoria.
3. Bill McKechnie (1925-Pirates, 1928-Cardinals, 1940-Cincinnati) Dick Williams (1967-Red Sox, 1972,73 Oakland) Bruce Bochy (1998- Padres, 2010,12,14 Giants) (2023-Texas)
4. Johnny Podres 1955. Pitched two complete games, including a shutout in Game 7. Surprised the MVP award began this late!
5. Bobby Richardson 1960. 12 RBI's versus Pittsburgh.

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ELLWOOD CITY CELEBRATES HACK WILSON WITH HISTORICAL MARKER DEDICATION

BY BILL PEARCH

When the Ellwood City (Pennsylvania) Area Historical Society recently rolled out the red carpet to honor one of its favorite sons, Hack Wilson, the date also marked the 89th anniversary of the legendary slugger's final Major League at bat at Pittsburgh's Forbes Field. The historical marker dedication on Friday, August 25, 2023, was also an intersection of several baseball passions.

NOTE: A new roadside marker sits by Woodside Avenue in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania honors Hall of Famer Hack Wilson. (Photo: Bill Pearch)

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