

**Interview with Vedic Himsl  
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SABR Oral History Collection**

*Interviewed by Brent Kelley, 1992  
Transcribed by Skylar Browning, 2018*

*In the 1950s, you were the head scout for the Cubs. Is that correct?*

VH: Well, no, not really. I worked in the office and scouted around the Chicago area and went out on special assignments, double-checked some players.

*Like the cross-checkers are today, sort of.*

VH: Yes.

*The Cubs signed three bonus babies. A pitcher named Don Kaiser in 1955 out of Oklahoma, which I guess you probably wouldn't have seen him, and then Jerry Kindall and Moe Drabowsky. I know you saw Kendall. Did you see Drabowsky before he was signed?*

VH: Where did he come out of?

*Indiana, I think ... You were present at the signing of Kindall.*

VH: Right.

*And evidently took a pretty hard look at him. The Cubs were not one of the more active teams in signing bonus babies, so evidently they must have gone over them pretty well before they decided to spend that kind of money. Obviously you must have thought Kindall had the potential. Was he able at that time, given the opportunity, to play major league baseball?*

VH: Well he was pretty close to it. He had a real good year his last year in the Big Ten. I believe they were in the College World Series his senior year.

*They won it, I believe.*

VH: Yeah. He had an outstanding year his senior year. Good athlete.

*Heck of a nice fella, too.*

VH: I've known him all over the years. I see him every once in a while in Arizona.

*I spoke with him. It's been several months ago and ... we spoke for nearly an hour and a half. Okay, the Cubs were not very active in it [signing bonus babies]. I guess Mr. Wrigley was the one who decided how the money was spent in the long run. What was his attitude, if you recall, toward bonus babies?*

VH: I don't recall anything about that. The general manager handled that. I don't recall Mr. Wrigley getting involved. He may have through the general manager when a situation of that nature that came up.

*But as far as you know there were never any restrictions?*

VH: No, no. I've never known of any restrictions. In all the years I was there, if we would reach a point we would go so far and that was it. We had a final decision that we'd make and we'd go so far and that was it.

*Were there other boys that you recall being asked to look at that came under the heading of bonus babies? Not ones that you signed, of course, but other kids in that area?*

VH: During that time? I don't recall any. I've gone through what records I have, what information I have here—a lot of it I didn't keep after I retired. I don't recall any off hand. If someone mentions a name to me sometimes I might be able to refresh my memory.

*It's been real hard even determining 40 years later who were the bonus babies. Of course, the guys like Kaline and Koufax and Killebrew, everybody knows were. But there are some other fellas that the two years they were required to sit on the bench they played four games and then disappeared. It's awful hard to determine if they were indeed bonus babies or not. So finding names of boys who weren't signed is really tricky.*

*You had three other boys in that time who were very young and did not receive bonus contracts. John Briggs, came to the Cubs in '56. These boys were pretty much in passing. He was a right-handed pitcher who came up first in 1956 when he was 19 years old. Do you recall him?*

VH: No, I do not

*Well, neither does anybody else. Another young man named Hy Cohen. He pitched and came up in '55 and he was about 20 years old at the time. But he came out of college.*

VH: He came up to the Cubs?

*Yes, sir.*

VH: I remember that name but I don't remember him pitching for the Cubs.

*He pitched just a little. You may have been in the restroom and missed him. How about Gordon Massa? He was in '57, the last year of the bonus rule.*

VH: What position?

*He was a pitcher too, I believe. No, I'm sorry, he was a catcher.*

VH: I was going to say. I would've guessed a catcher. That's about the only recollection I have of him.

*These boys didn't receive bonus contracts. I'm wondering if there was ever talk of it because they were very young when they came up and they were rushed through the minors. The problems with these 18-, 19-, 20-, even 21-year-old boys coming straight to the majors from amateur ball must've been great. Was there, with the Cubs, from your recollection, any problems with the managers or the coaches when these boys came in? That somebody had to go when these boys came to the team? I guess this could cause ill feelings, if nothing else, when a manager is deprived of a veteran player to carry someone who has no experience.*

VH: No, not that I know of. They were all eager to get someone, a young fella who was reported on to have potential. They were interested in working with them and helping to bring him along.

*Stan Hack was the manager at that time, wasn't he? He had a reputation far and wide for being one of the nicest men around.*

VH: He was an easy fella to get along with.

*A guy like Kaline who happened to be in the right place at the right time proved out to be an extremely good ballplayer, obviously. The Cubs boys were maybe not all in the right place at the right time, but all three of the Cubs bonus babies proved to be much better than the average when you look at the total career of the bonus babies. Even Kaiser, who was hurt but still had a productive year when he was 19 years old ... Was there more scouting or discussion put in on these boys than what other teams put in on their players?*

VH: No, I wouldn't think so. I think that all of those players that were considered in that category were pretty well scouted. You evaluate a player when you see him. You might have a bad look at them sometimes and someone else has a good look at them—that's how the scouting business goes. It's difficult to judge and evaluate. There's no guarantee that they're going to be successful. If they have the physical tools that you can see, then you figure they can make it.

*I guess that's all you can go on. That and the boy's makeup.*

VH: You try to get as much makeup as you can. You see them in different situations to determine that and see what his reactions are. Sometimes you're fortunate. You might see a game or two games and see everything you could possibly want to see. Other times you see a half-dozen times and you still haven't seen what you're looking for and the fella still may have good tools but he hasn't performed with the God-given tools that he has. There's no sure-fire way of determining it, I don't think. And I don't think anyone else does.

*You're most familiar with Kindall. In your opinion, if he were given the opportunity of Kaline—put in the lineup and told, 'You've got a job, play'—would he have made it at age 20 or 21?*

VH: Kindall? Well, he was given an opportunity. He did a pretty good job. I'd say he made it.

*He did. I guess I'm talking about the second year, the first full season he was on the roster. He was only a part-time player until 1960. At the age of 20, 21, if he'd been put into the lineup do you think he could've remained there?*

VH: That's a difficult thing to say. It depends on the competition. Who does he have to beat out? What talent do you have there? Sometimes you can put a player in right away and suffer with him for a little while. Sometimes you can't do that. You have to wait until he gets more experienced and develops, so he's ready to step in and take over, and has the confidence in himself to do it. If you take a college player, he's got a pretty good chance if he has the tools you're looking for. He has a chance of stepping in to the major leagues. You don't know how they react, what kind of pressure they can withstand ... Some athletes thrive on pressure, others wilt. Again, there's no guarantees. If there were guarantees, it'd be a much simpler profession.

*Life in general would be much easier. Do you remember a young man signed by Baltimore named Bruce Swango?*

VH: The name sounds vaguely familiar.

*He was a pitcher that evidently, of the 16 teams, probably at least a dozen offered him money. You talk about the pressure, he never played in a game because he went to pieces in front of all the people out there. He was released from his bonus contract, then eventually signed with the Yankees as a minor league outfielder and still couldn't take the pressure of the people watching.*

VH: You see it in all professional sports. Look at pro basketball, the money they're making now. Some of those fellas that have been outstanding college players struggle when they get into the pro ranks. Some of them rise to the top.

*This has been a uniformly detested rule that required the bonus babies to spend two years [on the roster]. What is your opinion, the general position of people in your position, of this rule?*

VH: Which rule are you talking about?

*The one that required the boys to spend two years on the major league roster.*

VH: To spend two years on a major league roster?

*Yes, sir. This is the rule Kindall was signed under. He had to spend two years on a major league roster before he was sent out.*

VH: I think they were optioned out, weren't they?

*After two years, yes, sir.*

VH: I thought the first couple years he alternated between our Texas club, AAA and the big club.

*No ... Kindall joined the Cubs at the end of June in 1956, spent '57 on the roster, and in '58 he was with the Cubs until the end of June at which time they sent him to Fort Worth. So he was there the full two years ... and there were about 60 of those boys that came under that ruling in those years.*

VH: And your question?

*How detrimental was it to those boys to have to sit on the bench for those two years?*

VH: It's pretty difficult to say. Some of them may thrive on that competition, that opportunity. Others it seemingly hurts them, they don't recover from it. It seems to me that a player like that is the type who wasn't able to relax or to fit in with the stiff competition. It was too much for him to feel comfortable with and be able to perform. There are some where nothing bothers them—they'll go out and just play. Maybe they don't quite have the ability, sometimes everything they do is wrong, sometimes there's a little bit of luck involved depending on how much opportunity they get. The pressure is on to win so much at the major leagues that they don't get a chance to really relax and enjoy what they're doing and do a better job.

*What about acceptance by the veteran players on the team? Do you think there was a problem with these boys being accepted by the guys who'd been around for six, eight or 10 years and weren't making that much money?*

VH: Possibly. I don't know if it was affecting some of the players. Put yourself in a position like that and how would you feel? Would you feel resentful if a guy comes in

and shows good ability and they give him an opportunity to play? Some people would and some people wouldn't.

*It's an individual thing. I see. Well, Vidie, thank you for your time.*

VH: I'm sorry I didn't have much information.

*You did. Every person I can talk to from this era is helpful ...*

VH: I like to help out as much as I can. My first year with the Cubs was 1953 and I did a lot of work around the office and during spring training and I gradually worked into this job. I was a little bit new at this particular time and it's been a long time.

*Forty years. It's surprising. Some people I talk to and they can tell me verbatim conversations that occurred at that time and others—*

VH: People like that are guys who are very talkative and they tell stories a lot, over and over so many times that they remember them maybe not quite the same way as the original. You get the gist of the thing. I've never been that way, to talk very much about the players like this. I've tried to analyze them and study them and report on them and make my opinion and make my recommendation. From there on, it's up to the individual. Some scouts, they keep talking about the players they signed or the ones they missed, and they keep talking over and over about the stories so they never forget ... If I've helped you a little bit, I'm happy to do that.

*Getting information from 40 years ago is a challenge, but it's available and I will get it eventually.*

VH: I didn't keep a lot of stuff from years back but now I'm beginning to wish that I had. I talked with a fella the other day and he happened to have an encyclopedia to find out when Kaiser signed. I didn't remember Kaiser. I looked in a book that I had here that had when we traded him away, and I found it there, but I still can't visualize the fella.

*Big tall boy. A farmer. He's not a farmer now but he was then. He's a sheriff now in Oklahoma. He went 49-1 in high school. He certainly overpowered the local Oklahoma kids.*

VH: Did you talk to Bill Capps?

*No, I didn't.*

VH: Bill Capps was probably the fella that signed him.

*Do you know where he's located?*

VH: He's in Fort Worth ... or Arlington. ... I have his address. I send him a Christmas card every year ... Arlington, Texas. [Supplies address and phone number.] He worked Texas and Oklahoma, so I'm pretty sure he would've been the one who signed him.

*Well, you have contributed. Just getting the feel of the people of the time is helpful, so thank you.*

[They discuss the present weather in Chicago and Kentucky for about a minute. The last three minutes are dead air.]

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