

INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR JERRY GRILLO

Tracking the Big Cat from Demorest to Cooperstown

Below is a conversation with author and SABR Magnolia Chapter member Jerry Grillo about his newly published book on Hall-of-Fame slugger Johnny Mize.

— Praise For “Big Cat” —

“In rollicking fashion, Jerry Grillo gives Johnny Mize a fresh look and a sweet dose of appreciation.”

Tom Stanton, author

“An insightful and well-crafted biography. Grillo captures the essence of the man and his time.”

Donald Honig, novelist & baseball historian

MM: *Why did you choose Johnny Mize? What is it about his story that interests you?*

Grillo: First and probably most important, I’m a lifelong baseball fan, particularly of the game’s history. I grew up hearing stories of Johnny Mize, and of course, Joe DiMaggio, Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays, Yogi Berra, Duke Snider, Mickey Mantle – the New York teams of the ‘40s and ‘50s – the era of my father and uncles. Their stories of baseball from the days when the city had three ball clubs captivated me as a kid.

Fast forward to February 1999. I’d recently become editor

of the newspaper in Habersham County, Georgia, about five miles from Mize’s hometown, Demorest. I got a phone call from Judi Mize, Johnny’s stepdaughter, who was living in the old family home, now called Diamond Acre. She had a feature story to pitch about her father, who had died five or six years earlier. Anyway, we got to know each other, and after a year or so, I told her I’d like to write a book about her father, and she loved the idea.

I started doing my research, interviewing old ballplayers who knew Mize, and writing some chapters, which I sent to McFarland Books (sometime

in 2001). To my surprise, they wanted to publish the book. But before I could respond to them, life intervened. Our son was born with significant disabilities and my focus shifted to an entirely new family dynamic and the 9-to-5 job. It hurt to tell McFarland that I had to put the project on hold for a while. That turned into 20-plus years! But I always knew that I’d get back to the Big Cat and was pleased that University of Nebraska Press was interested in publishing the book.

One kind of broad thing that interests me about Mize’s story is, it’s a big, classic American tale, almost mythological. This

big teenager from a broken home in the Appalachian foothills, a blood relative of Ty Cobb, is a baseball prodigy. He’s somehow discovered by big league baseball, spends six years roaming baseball’s backroads as a minor leaguer, and one incredible winter as a barnstorming hero with Latin American and Black superstars in the Caribbean.

Then he’s an instant sensation with the Gas House Gang, has a great career as one of the best sluggers in an age of great sluggers, serves in the Navy during World War II using a bat instead of a rifle, playing ball on

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Grillo, tossing the horsehide and donning a “Who’s on First” baseball shirt. Photo: author.

Tinian, the launching point for the atomic bomb attacks that ended the war. He challenges Babe Ruth’s single season home run record (and by the way, the Babe marries Johnny’s cousin Claire), then finishes his career with the champion Yankees. Then, the inexplicably long wait for the Hall of Fame. An amazing life!

Finally, there’s the local angle. I’ve lived in this part of the world, close to Mize’s hometown, for 25 years. So, it’s an honor to be able to tell the story of someone who is from this beautiful portion of Northeast Georgia.

MM: Mize hit for both power and average, but in what ways was he NOT the stereotypical power hitter?

Grillo: His meticulous approach to hitting that bordered on the scientific and artistic. He studied pitchers and pitches, had more bats than any other five players put together, weighed them all himself, and arranged them with the care of a painter with his brushes.

He was a contact hitter with tremendous power to all fields, especially earlier in his career. As he got older, he took advantage of the shorter right-field fences in the Polo Grounds and Yankee Stadium, but still could hit to all fields, and spread the danger around – he was one of the few sluggers to hit a home run in every big-league park he played in.

And he rarely struck out. He’s the only player to hit 50-plus homers in a season and strike out less than 50 times. Like Ted Williams, he had a terrific batting eye and rarely swung at pitches outside the zone. Williams called him, “one of the really outstanding hitters in baseball history. I always thought he was one of the very best.”

MM: What was Mize’s greatest baseball accomplishment in your opinion? What did Mize himself think it was?

Grillo: I think his 1947 season, when he hit 51 home runs and struck out just 42 times is his greatest individual

accomplishment. That will never be repeated. But also, hitting three home runs in a game six times is amazing. That record has only been matched by two other people (Sammy Sosa and Mookie Betts). Playing on five straight World Series championship teams isn’t an individual accomplishment but is pretty cool, and rare.

Mize’s favorite thrill was his ninth-inning, pinch hit, two-run single off Ralph Branca of the Dodgers of the 1949 World Series, which helped lift the Yankees to the win in Game 4. That clutch hit was also Casey Stengel’s favorite moment of that season, his first as the Yankees’ manager.

MM: Who gave him the moniker, the Big Cat?

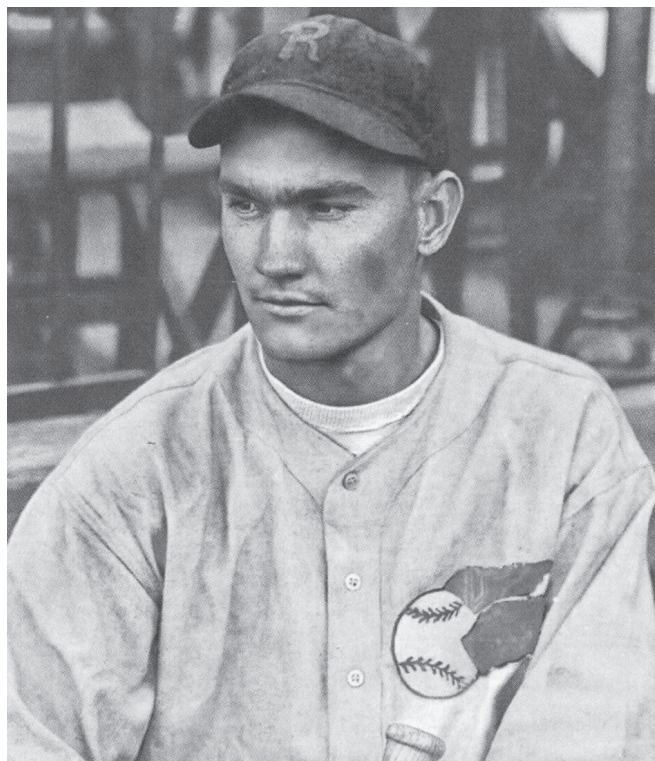
Grillo: There are several stories about this. In his book, “How to Hit,” Mize claimed he got the nickname from his Cardinals teammate, Joe Orengo, who was

playing second base. According to Mize, the infielders were making some bad throws that day and Mize kept digging them out and Orengo called over to him, “Atta boy, John, you look like a big cat.” He said newspaper men overheard it and the nickname stuck.

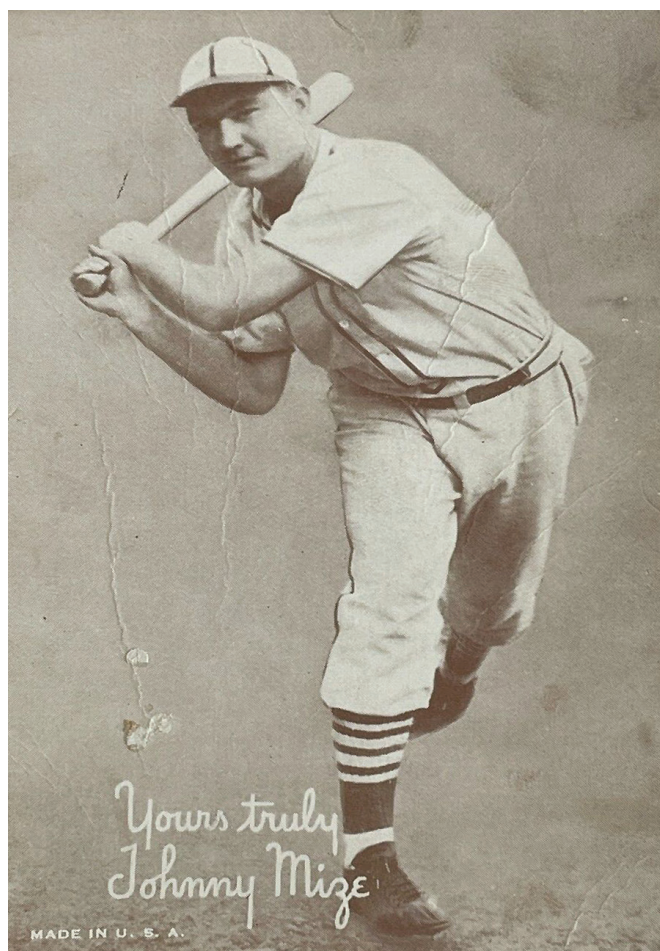
Another story has his former Giants teammate Bill Rigney giving him the nickname for the plodding way he stalked around the first base bag. It was not a compliment, Rigney said. Then again, another Giants teammate, Buddy Blattner said they came up with the nickname because, “Johnny was a big pussycat.”

My favorite explanation is from Stan Musial, who loved Mize: “Remember how he reacted when they knocked him back? He’d just lean back on his left foot, bend his body back and let the pitch go. Then he’d lean back into the batter’s box and resume his stance, graceful as a big cat.”

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Johnny Mize with the Rochester Red Wings, 1933 to 1935. Photo: 2012 Topps MILB Legends baseball card



Johnny Mize postcard with the St. Louis Cardinals, 1939.
Photo: ebay.

MM: Of his three stops (Cardinals, Giants, Yankees), where was he the happiest? Or least happy?

Grillo: On December 7, 1941, while hunting in the Ozarks, Mize got a phone call from Brooklyn Dodgers manager Leo Durocher at a backwoods general store. Leo asked Johnny how he'd feel about leaving the Cardinals and becoming a Dodger. Mize answered, "it doesn't mean a damn to me where I play, as long as I play."

So, he was openly unsentimental, having learned early on the mercenary underpinnings of the professional game. He never really said one team

was better to play for than another, although based on what I learned about the man's pragmatic nature, he probably looked back on those Yankee years as his favorite. I mean, five pennants, five World Series titles. He made lasting friendships with guys like Joe DiMaggio, Yogi Berra, Hank Bauer, Bobby Brown.

He was happy as a Giant, too, though – until Leo Durocher became the manager in 1949. He had his best home run years with the Giants, genuinely liked his manager Mel Ott and team owner Horace Stoneham. But with his skills noticeably diminishing in his late 30s, going to the Yankees was like a reward for him.

In retrospect, Mize was probably least happy with the Cardinals, even though he put up jaw-dropping numbers. The team kept falling short of the pennant and Johnny kept fighting with Branch Rickey over pennies each season. Years later he said he regretted signing with the Cardinals at 17, because he was relegated to their vast minor league system for six years, for lousy pay. He claimed they signed him illegally and said he wished he'd had the presence of mind to complain to Commissioner Landis and somehow get out of the contract. C'est la vie, Big Cat.

MM: Did you uncover new information about Mize that is not generally known by baseball historians?

Grillo: Yes, a few things, and it was kind of like discovering treasure. Besides discovering stories from some of his old friends about growing up in Demorest, my favorite is the Martin Dihigo story. I devoted an entire chapter to it.

When Mize was an old man, he was asked about the greatest player he ever saw. He said it was Martin Dihigo, the Cuban and Negro Leagues legend. Johnny, who was probably close to 80 at the time, recalled that he played winter ball in the Dominican Republic on a team led by Dihigo in 1943.

His comments about that winter experience became a white whale for me! I was obsessed with finding out the truth of this one comment, because Mize was not the talkative type. He didn't tell good all-day stories. Even his family knew almost nothing about this story. And for a long time, I couldn't find anything useful. Then, thanks to 21st-century internet search engines, I was able to piece together a complete story of that amazing winter.

For starters, it turned out Mize was off by about 10 years. His winter adventure with Dihigo was in 1933-34. Mize joined a ragtag team from Richmond, Virginia, comprised of mostly minor leaguers, on a barnstorming trip to Puerto Rico. Johnny amazed local fans with his tremendous hitting power, and he was recruited by Dihigo to play for a super-team of Latin American and Black players, who went on to win the Trujillo Tournament in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic.

When Mize had to leave the team for spring training back in the U.S., his replacement as a top slugger in the lineup was a fellow named Josh Gibson.

MM: Why did it take so long (1981) for Mize to be recognized by the Hall of Fame?

Grillo: That is a great question. There are probably several reasons, none of them very good. When he retired, there were stories tabbing him as a can't-miss Hall of Famer. He retired in 1953. In 1954, the Hall extended its eligibility rules to five full years following retirement. By the time Johnny was eligible, Hall elections were only held on even-numbered years, a practice that lasted through 1966. Then he failed to make the cut with the writers through 1973, when he rolled off the BBWAA ballot.

Author Joe Posnanski called the years following Mize's retirement, "the dark period of Hall of Fame voting." From 1957 to 1971, the writers only voted nine players into the Hall. I think by the time we get into the 1960s and 1970s, most of the writers who remembered Mize, remembered him from his Yankee years, when he was a part-time player, a pinch-hitting specialist, but not a superstar.

There weren't many around

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Johnny Mize, 1953 Topps baseball card

who could recall that from 1936 through 1948 (with three years off to serve in World War II), he was one of the best hitters the game had ever seen. Consequently, he kind of fell through the cracks.

Also, being a quiet giant who could come off as gruff at times, Mize did not make a lot of friends with the baseball establishment. Johnny was probably not as popular with newspapermen as some other ballplayers. But when he finally got the call in 1981, he delivered a memorable acceptance speech that got lots of laughs.

MM: What is your own personal approach to writing a book? How do you conduct your research?

Grillo: I've written two books, both biographies, and the first thing that I did for each was to simultaneously research previously published material

about my subjects while finding and interviewing people who knew them or had personal experiences with them. Those interviews and early research help me develop an early outline, and a rough plan for chapters – enough to write a chapter or two and send a good pitch to a publisher (like University of Nebraska Press, in the case of “Big Cat”).

Then, more research to support my outline, which inevitably changes at least a little as the material accumulates and themes emerge. Sometimes, the story evolves. Like with Mize's adventures in the Caribbean. When I first started researching the book, I didn't know anything about it, and there was almost nothing available to back up his Dihigo story. I even interviewed one researcher who thought Mize made it up, that it never really happened, or it happened in another country. So, further research really made a difference

and gave Mize's story the rich detail that it needed.

Most of my research can be done at home, in books that I own or bought or borrowed, on my laptop, searching databases of newspapers, or digital copies of books and magazines. I spend a lot of time in university libraries, which have some great collections to look through. And I try to visit the places where my subjects lived and thrived. With the Mize book, I live just a few miles from his hometown, so I even though his daughter Judi has died, the old Mize home is still there in Demorest. And it's easy to walk across the campus of Piedmont University and imagine the home runs that Johnny Mize hit across the green quad. All part of the research that went into the book!

And though I never met Mize – he died six years before I moved to this area – I was able to interview his stepchildren,

and his nephew, I was able to track down some older ballplayers and writers who knew him.

Even while writing the book, the research continues. I use the outline as a kind of interstate map, and the scenic route reveals itself while I'm writing. I'm usually adding source material right up until the very end of the writing process.

MM: When you are drafting chapters, do you have a certain reading audience in mind? If so, what demographic?

Grillo: Yes and no. I start out just writing for myself. Then I start thinking about the people who might be really interested in the subject, which helps me focus on making the story as authentic as possible. Then, after that, I start asking myself, “will the ‘average’ reader enjoy it?” I'm not saying that a person who hates baseball will enjoy my book about Johnny Mize. But I've tried to tell the kind of story that twisted person might enjoy. Thinking that way helps keep me going in the best direction.

In the end, my goal with the Mize book was to write a story that a casual fan, or even a non-fan, can enjoy just as much as an avid fan, or a baseball history nerd like me. So, I try to think across demographic boundaries; thinking of readers like me (baseball history folks), but with a respectful nod to people who just enjoy reading true stories that are (hopefully) well told. ♦

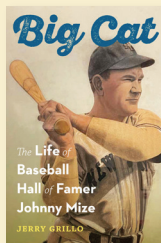


Johnny Mize at his Hall-of-Fame induction, August 2, 1981. Mize was elected to Cooperstown with Rube Foster and Bob Gibson. Photo: mlb.com

Big Cat, The Life of Baseball Hall of Famer Johnny Mize
By Jerry Grillo

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About the author

Jerry Grillo is a journalist and published author living in north Georgia. His work has appeared in Georgia Trend, Atlanta Magazine, Paste Magazine and Newsday.

About the book cover

The cover illustration is a painting by Edward Hastings Ford, who presented the artwork to Mize in 1947. The Mize family gave it to Piedmont University in Demorest, GA. The painting hangs in the Piedmont University library.

LOCAL BASEBALL HISTORY

From Ash to Diamond



For more than half a century, the Hanna Manufacturing Company of Athens, Georgia, produced baseball bats made from ash and crafted for the game's biggest stars: Gehrig, Ruth, Mize, DiMaggio, Mantle and Matthews.

BY GEORGE T. COUNTER, member of SABR Magnolia

Here is a wonderful look at a lost piece of Georgia baseball history, researched and written by chapter member George T. Counter. The article first appeared in the Autumn 2017 issue of Georgia Backroads. George is retired educator from White County, Georgia.

—C.B.

In the 1950s and '60s, I grew up in the small town of Flat Rock, Michigan. Each year, I anxiously awaited the first sign of spring, because then it was time to play baseball!

Baseball was king in the spring and summer in my home town. As far as I was concerned, the key to a successful season was choosing the proper bat. Should I use a J.C. Higgins, a Western Auto, a Louisville Slugger, a Hanna Batrite, an Adirondack Big Stick, a Spalding, a Rawlings, or just have Dad make one for me?

In 1957, when I was 10 years old, I played for the Royal Order of the M.O.O.S.E. Lodge, our sponsor, and we won our local recreation department championship. I recall I used a Western Auto Wizard bat that year as Western Auto was our go-to sporting goods store in town.

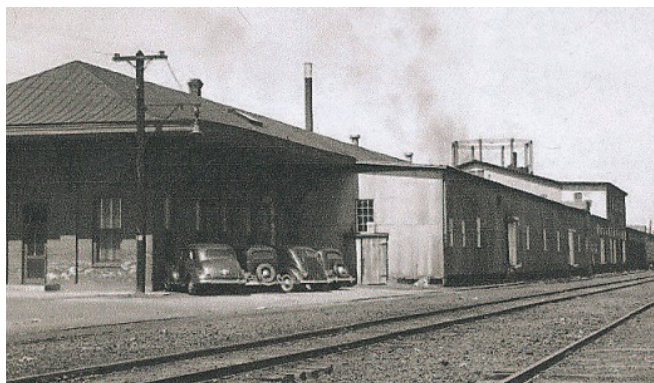
In 1971, I was offered a special education teachers position and moved to North Georgia with my family. It wasn't until 1985 that a friend of mine, Jim Forrest, asked if I knew once there had been a baseball factory in Athens,

Georgia. In doing some research into this forgotten bat factory, I came across the story of the Hanna Manufacturing Company of Athens. To my surprise, I uncovered quite a bit of information about this one-time thriving bat factory. And to this day, I'm still uncovering information about Hanna Manufacturing.

In 1985, I found the abandoned building that had housed the original factory. The business had been shut down for about a decade. The factory building was located in the old industrial area of Athens, besides the railroad tracks, behind today's Classic Center and the Athens Metro Transit Authority Station.

By 1985, the building was deteriorating quite rapidly. The front part of the factory had originally housed the Central of Georgia Railroad ticket office. As Jim Forrest and I carefully walked through the building, we noticed all of the equipment had long since been removed, but there were a few papers scattered throughout. I found a few turning orders from the mid-1930s and a few bat price lists from 1974, Hanna's last year production.

As I walked through the building, I got a general idea of the factory layout. I noticed the main office, sales office, storage room, drying room, turning room, finishing room and shipping room. I also got an idea as to where I thought the wood was unloaded from the



Foreground, the Central of Georgia Railroad Station. In back, the Hanna Manufacturing Company. Athens, GA, 1940s. Photo: Georgia Backroads.

railroad cars and how the billets moved through the factory to the finished product.

I thought that would be the end of my research, but a couple of things happened to rekindle my interest in Hanna Manufacturing. About eight months after my initial visit, I came upon two Hanna Batrite bats at Archie's Sporting Goods in Gainesville: an HFS KELL Style and an HFS MATTHEWS Style. Later, at Bulldog Sporting Goods in Athens, Harris Sporting Goods in Seneca, South Carolina, and North Georgia Sporting Goods in Clarksville, I found more Hanna Batrites for my new collection.

A couple of months later, Hanna manufacturing was back in the news, as a giant fire swept through the entire back portion of the factory. It completely gutted more than half of the original factory building, so I decided to find as much history as I could about Hanna before

it was destroyed or otherwise vanished.

After numerous telephone calls to places like the Athens Historical Society, the Athens Heritage Foundation, the University of Georgia Library, the *Athens Banner Herald* and various local historians and collectors, I found a name connected to Hanna Manufacturing: J. E. Broadnax. He put me in contact with another Hanna employee, Mel Bond. Both men were 81 years old, had been employed by Hanna and agreed to sit for taped interviews.

Johnny Broadnax had strong ties to the University of Georgia, where he quarterbacked the football team from 1925 to 1927. He began working at Hanna in 1950 and worked his way up to general manager. Mel Bond began working at Hanna in 1933 and retired in 1974. He worked his way

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Hanna employee Willis Sheldon grades seasoned wood on scales at Athens factory. Photo: Georgia Backroads.

up to factory superintendent. Both men provided a wealth of information about the company.

Clay Hanna of Indiana founded Hanna's Manufacturing Company in 1915 or 1917. He had come to Athens after brief stops in Indiana, Oklahoma, and Macon. He had invented the split-handle coal shovel used by most railroads, and the original Hanna Company was developed to manufacture handles for shovels, hand tools and farm implements.

Hanna Manufacturing began operating in the Georgia Railroad ticket office in Athens. According to J. E. Broadnax, the business expanded until it eventually took over the entire building, which was approximately 400 yards or two city blocks long.

In 1925 or '26, after about ten years in the handle business, Hanna switched to manufacturing baseball bats. The company made toy bats for department stores such as Woolworth's, McClellans and Kress. Shortly after the Great Depression, it began producing

regular bats for sporting goods stores, colleges, the military and Major League Baseball.

Hanna made bats from about 1925 until the company went out of business in 1976. During its half-century in business, it survived a legal battle with Louisville Slugger, which sued Hanna around 1936. Louisville Slugger claimed that it had exclusive rights to manufacture bats with the player's facsimile autograph on the barrel of the bat. Hanna prevailed because it used a player's last name and the word "Style." For instance, Hanna made Ruth Style and Musial Style bats instead of using a player's facsimile autograph.

Going toe-to-toe in court with a large company like Louisville Slugger was expensive, but Clay Hanna could afford to do so. His largest source of revenue at the time came from the tools he manufactured and sold to the federal government for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), during the Great Depression.

At one time, Hanna manufactured more than 1.5 million bats a year, exceeding that of competitors like Hillerich & Bradsby. Until World War II, Hanna shipped bats to every state and all over the world, including Cuba, Canada, the West Indies, Mexico, Central America, Venezuela, Hawaii and the Philippines. Newspaper accounts at the time reported that Fidel Castro's regime still owed for the last shipment of bats before the embargo of that country began. During World War II, the Armed Forces Recreational Program controlled the wood supply, limiting production and sales.

Hanna originally used the wood of ash and hickory in making bats. The ash was used for baseball bats, the hickory for softball bats. Problems developed with ash grown in the south, however, as the inconsistent southern spring seasons caused uneven grain development in the wood. Clay Hanna decided to look north for ash grown in a more temperate climate. He bought acreage in the mountains of Pennsylvania and New York, where he built two small wood processing factories, one in Kingston, New York, and the other in Bradford, Pennsylvania.

After felling a tree, the wood was cut to a rough length of 38 to 40 inches, squared into two-and-a-half inch or three-inch billets or dowels, loaded on railroad cars, and shipped to the factory in Athens. Originally the factory had 25 to 30 employees, eventually reaching a peak of 125 after World War II. These

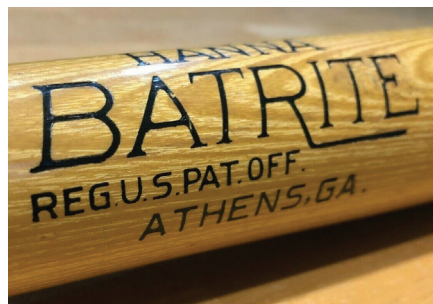
workers, who lived in Athens, Bogart, Danielsville, Bowman, and other communities, made 30 cents an hour. There were also 30 employees at each of the northern operations and about 35 to 40 salesmen across the United States.

When the dowels arrived at the bat factory, employees graded, sorted, and stacked them to dry. Mr. Broadnax and Mr. Bond explained that storage was a major problem. The lumber required plenty of open space for stacking and drying. Drying took a minimum of eight weeks and usually much longer. Fans were used to circulate the air, and Bond stressed that the wood could not dry too fast. Sometimes, he explained, they used a kiln to dry the wood. They used a meter to monitor moisture content, inserting needles into the wood to measure the moisture, striving for 14% to 15%.

One interesting sidelight to the bat production process was the necessity of removing the scrap pieces from the factory. Mr. Broadnax told me that the scrap pieces, called "dimension stock," were stockpiled until there was enough to fill a truck or railroad car. Loads were transported to Mobile, Alabama, and then by ship to England or India, where they were used to make handles for small tools like screwdrivers and hammers. And some of the scrap went into a pile for Athens residence to use for barbecues.

When the wood was properly graded and dried, it was ready

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There were many different label designs for the Hanna Batrite bat. This example was from a "Slaughter Style" bat from the 1940s. Photo: ebay.

to be turned. Three-inch wood was used for baseball bats, and two-and-a-half-inch wood was used for softball bats. Employees refer to as “equalizers” seemed to know exactly which end to use for the barrels and which end for the handles. They looked for knots in the run of the grain in making the decision.

When an order came in, perhaps 100 or 200 bats of a particular model, the proper amount of wood was weighed and selected. The bats were graded once more after they had been machine sanded. Next, they were sanded one more time and then branded with the Hanna or Batrite trademark for the final finishing material was applied.

When finished, the bats went to the shipping department, where they were inspected for the final time. The inspectors looked for knots, small cracks, and uneven grain. The culls were thrown out.

The top line of Hanna bats was called Batrite or WTA. These were unblemished white (and some dark) bats. The next line down was called the Hanna or TA, which was the lower priced version of the Batrite. The bottom line was the chain-store line of bats sold to Kress, Woolworth's, and McClellan stores. There was also a custom-made (the CM line), which was made for professional baseball players or special orders. And there were six or seven grades of softball and Little League bats, as well as a miniature souvenir bat.

Mr. Bond and Mr. Broadnax both recalled that many professional ballplayers visited the Hanna factory on the way to spring training in Florida. These included Babe Ruth, Johnny Mize and Luke Appling. Some ballplayers would leave a particular model bat and place an order for half-dozen or so to be made for them and sent to their ball club for the upcoming

baseball season.

Among the bat styles that I found listed in the 1937 Hanna catalog were the Ruth, Hornsby, Gehrig, Kyler, Foxx, Klein, Ott, Cronin, Appling, Greenberg, and many others. Those models sold for \$2.50 apiece.

College teams brought many Hanna bats. Mr. Broadnax had contacts with most college coaches, arising from his ties to the University of Georgia. He called on major colleges in his capacity as sales manager for Hanna.

The Hanna Manufacturing Company developed many innovative features for bats. Some were popular and some fell by the wayside, as they were not accepted in the market.

The first innovation came in 1933 with the patented Batrite Non-Chipping Treatment. This involved injecting the wood with a special substance that bonded it more securely, reducing splintering and shattering. This process was used on all Hanna bats until the factory closed in 1976.

Two years later, Hanna introduced the Flox “Hold Fast” grip to ballplayers, especially those who perspired heavily. This special grip was smooth and seamless, closely resembled suede, and was secured at each end by black tape. This allowed players to grip the bat securely even on the most hot and humid summer days.

Hanna introduced a cork grip in 1936. Then in 1941, the company developed 6 styles of bats approved by different college baseball coaches. Each had improved weight placement that gave the bat a better center of balance, allowing a smoother, more powerful swing. That same year, Hanna introduced diamond taping and rubber grip handles.

In 1958, Hanna announced the color keyed knob, which indicated the length of the bat. Green, blue, yellow, black, and

red were used. This helped little leaguers identify their preferred bat lengths.

The final innovation process introduced by Hanna was the fiberglass sleeve, which was incorporated into the bat handle. Mr. Broadnax told me these were popular in the little leagues, because they reduced the number of broken bats. This came about through Hanna's research on tool handles.

The Hanna Manufacturing Company started to decline in the 1970s. Mr. Broadnax told me that a part of the problem was the development of aluminum bats. Hanna did have an aluminum bat listed in the 1973 catalog, but apparently could not make a go of it.

It seems ironic that Hanna Manufacturing closed on its 60th anniversary. Today, all that is left of the old factory building is a commemorative plaque on the floor level of the Athens Metro Transit Authority station and some abandoned railroad tracks that serve as reminders

of what once was a thriving business on the south side of town.

Hanna baseball bats are highly collectible in today's market. This is especially true of authenticated bats used by major league ballplayers in games. Two years ago, a previously unknown game-used Lou Gehrig Hanna Batrite bat sold at auction for \$436,970. The bat was matched to a photo of the Yankee great holding the bat outside a batting cage at Chicago's Comiskey Park in 1930.

There is a photo of Georgia's own Johnny Mize holding a Hanna Batrite. Mize played for Piedmont College in Demorest, and then went on to play for the St. Louis Cardinals, New York Giants and New York Yankees in a Hall of Fame career. Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Eddie Matthews, and Minnie Minoso, to name a few, are also featured in photographs while holding Batrite bats. ♦



Chicago Daily News photo of Yankees Babe Ruth, Bob Shawkey and Lou Gehrig at Comiskey Park, 1930. Gehrig held a Hanna Batrite bat in his hands. This bat sold for \$436,970 at auction in 2015. Photo: Chicago History Museum.

BASEBALL HOBBIES

APBA Game Boy

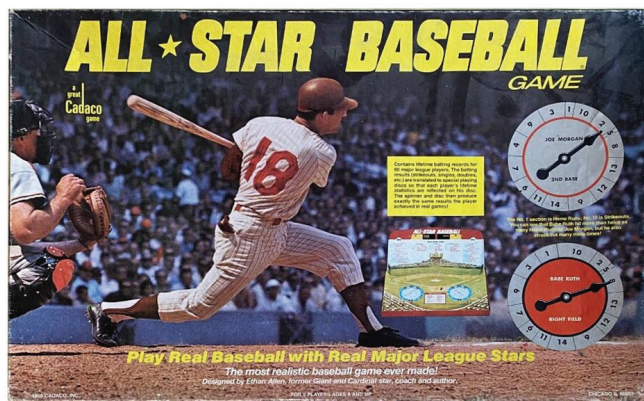
How a baseball board game became a pastime for life.

BY ED KAY, member of SABR Magnolia



I originally wrote the following in response to a question from my sons about how I began my life-long fascination with APBA and our APBA league. This version is edited slightly.

In my early pre-teen and teen years, I looked for a game to simulate baseball. When I was in seventh grade, I received a game called *All-Star Baseball*. It was composed of a spinner and an individual player card which was fitted to the spinner.



All-Star Baseball board game by Cadaco, 1968. Photo: ebay

Numbers were placed in wedges around the card and the size of the wedge showed the frequency of the play result. As I recall, this game did not come with all the MLB players, so I would create player cards out of paper to fit over the spinner, so that I could play a season. However, while I played this for several years it was a bit tedious to remove and place a card. It also wasn't statistically accurate. I looked for other relatively inexpensive games that would better simulate the game.

APBA was founded in 1951 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania by J. Richard Seitz. They routinely advertised in *The Sporting News*, and other sports magazines, but the price of the game was beyond my pre-teen and early teen savings.

In late 1969, I decided to act on their latest ad. By now, I was 17, working summer jobs and had enough of my own money to afford this game, so I took a chance and ordered it. The first season I bought was the 1969

season. The way the basic game works is simple. Each player card has 36 numbers relating to rolling two dice (the red die is the first number; the white die is the second). Each player card has an individual outcome based on a dice roll from 1,1 to 6,6. For instance, rolling a "66" for a power hitter the number on the card might be 1, which would be a home run. However, once reading the result on the player card, you then refer to one of eight cards with the base situation, where the result could

be affected by the grade of the opposing pitcher or the ability of a fielder.

Pitchers were rated from A (the best) to D (the worst). Despite the simplicity of the basic game, it produced results over the course of a season generally consistent with the players' MLB season performance and their team's finish. Once you became familiar with the playing process, it took roughly 15 minutes to complete a game.

I quickly became hooked and started replaying Red Sox seasons. I did not bring the game to college with me, but it did eat up a lot of my spare time during summer breaks when I wasn't on my NROTC summer cruises or working.

Once I graduated from college I started buying the new season's player cards. I didn't take it with me when I was deployed (enough things to do on the ship), but I was sure to resume some of my Red Sox single-season replays once home. I bought a bunch of past seasons and eagerly started Red Sox replays for some of these seasons. At the time, an

independent gamer started publishing a fan magazine called *The APBA Journal*. I held a monthly subscription from 1971 until the magazine folded in 2002. One year, I received a free subscription for predicting pitcher grades for the upcoming season. Two or three of my Red Sox replays were published. I remember the 1949 replay was published, but I don't remember which others made it in.

APBA had competition over the years, and I tried those games including *Strat-O-Matic*, *Statis Pro*, *Action*, *Replay*, and *Out-of-the-Park*, among others, but APBA was the clear winner for me. After meeting my wife, I learned that her brother (a Cubs fan) was a *Strat-O-Matic* player.

All these baseball board games have some issues in trying to balance playability with realism. For the APBA basic baseball game, the number of pitcher grades was limited (even though they had strikeout and control ratings). Stolen bases were automatically called from the player card and caught stealing attempts were virtually unheard of. Arm strength for fielders was non-existent.

Recognizing these limitations, APBA introduced the *Master Game* in 1975. Players were now given stolen base ratings based on frequency and success rates. Catchers were given caught stealing ratings; all fielders were given arm ratings, and the *Master Game* boards assigned a value to the hit to judge against

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The origins of APBA

The game dates back to the 1930s and a bunch of high-school buddies in Lancaster, PA. The boys played a baseball simulation game created by one of them, J. Richard (Dick) Seitz. His game was based on an old tabletop baseball game called *National Pastime*. But unlike any previous board game, Seitz's game combined the randomness of dice with the on-field performances of individual players. The boys called themselves the American Professional Baseball Association, or APBA, pronounced "APP-bah." From apbagames.com.



APBA player cards from 2000. Photo: ebay

the speed of the runner and arm rating of the fielders involved.

Pitchers were now rated on a 1-30 basis and given additional ratings for wild pitches, move to first, fatigue, and home run susceptibility.

Of course, I bought the *Master Game*. The problem: my 15-minute experience with the basic game now took 30-45 minutes with the *Master Game*.

While the *Master Game* was more like real baseball, it just took too long to play, and the increased accuracy to real-life MLB didn't justify, for me, the increased play time.

Doing solo replays was fine, but once my sea tour ended and I had more time at home, I was getting intrigued by the APBA leagues that had formed. In late 1978, I responded to

an APBA *Journal* ad seeking managers for the Bluegrass Baseball Association (the BBA), a league that had just expanded to 20 teams. I sent my qualifications: an avid baseball fan, playing APBA since 1970, several published replays. Alas, the open manager positions had been filled, but I could stay on as a backup.

Within two months, I was asked if I would take over a team that had been an expansion team for the 1978 season (they ended that season 55-103). I thought taking over a down team would be a great idea as I could have fun building it into a powerhouse. The team had only one star player, Eddie Murray, and within two weeks in the league I got about six lopsided trade offers for him (uh, no). In fact, one Baltimore area baseball team offered me a 10 for 1 trade. While enticing, I still refused it.

I quickly named my team the Norfolk Moles. Why Moles? I was still in the Navy as an E-2C flight officer. We were nicknamed Moles because after takeoff all windows and interior doors were closed to eliminate any outside light reflecting on our scopes. Because we did our work in the dark, we were nicknamed "Moles".

Prior to 1979, the BBA did its rookie "draft" via a mailed-in auction process. For 1979, they switched to a phone draft. You would get a call when it was your turn to draft. Any picks made by other teams since your last pick would be relayed to you. We started the draft at 8 AM on a Saturday morning. Imagine the time this took as the calling manager would need to relay at least 19 previous picks to you before your pick. At midnight, we had only completed four of six rounds (each round has multiple cycles). We called it a night and picked it up for the last two rounds on Sunday afternoon.

It turned out that on Saturday afternoon one of our managers had left his phone off the hook for several hours as managers tried to break through the busy signal and our commissioner pleaded with the telephone company to do something. In later years, we figured out that having a manager host several managers would streamline this. We also had someone from the main group (which typically had six to ten managers in attendance) call often to update managers well before their pick came up. Even with these steps, the draft still went to 5 or 6pm. Of course, now we do the draft in a chat room and are typically done by 1 PM.

My 1979 Norfolk Moles team wasn't much better than the team I inherited. We finished 61-97. But I had drafted a pitcher, Bob Welch, who would be a consistent starter for me for fifteen years.

All this time of course, I am rolling dice. At times, my wife found hearing those dice rolls annoying as she was in the bedroom trying to read. She mentioned this to my sister once, who replied, "he's still playing that game?"

To appease her, I responded to an advertisement for APBA dice-roll random number sheets that I saw in the APBA *Journal*. For my solo games, I would use the random number sheets, while rolling the actual dice for BBA games.

In 1980, we moved to Meadowview Lane in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. The team's name changed to the Meadowview Moles, and our record improved to 70-88. (Over the years, our team name would change to Malvern Moles in 1982, Manlius Moles in 1991 and Tuxford Moles in 1996).

In 1981, we had our first winning season: 81-77. One might think building a winning team is easy but playing and

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building against 19 to 23 other managers who are also avid baseball fans, sway the odds against quick fixes.

In 1982, led by Eddie Murray, Brian Downing, speedster Mookie Wilson (20 triples – still a Moles single season record) and a pitching staff anchored by 21-game winner Bob Welch we went 97-61 to win our first division championship. Alas, we lost in the league playoffs.

Over my 40 plus years in the league, we have finished with the division championship 14 times, parlaying that into four American League championships (1988, 1998, 2002, 2013) and one BBA championship (2013). As many real-life managers have said, “winning is hard.”

I’ve had tough luck in a couple BBA championship games. In 1988, I held the lead in game 7 of our World Series when a punch-and-judy hitter, Geno Petralli, hit a game-winning 3-run home run in the bottom of the ninth to deny me a win (Geno had a 12-year MLB career with 24 home runs). Geno will forever live in the Moles hall of infamy. In 2002, Roger Clemens pitched a no-hitter for me in a World Series game only to lose 1-0 on an unearned run.

In 1990 APBA, in a working relationship with Miller Associates, introduced a computer-version modeled after their *Master Game* called *Baseball for Windows* (BBW). This ran on DOS, and I started playing it for my solo replays almost at once. In 1992, they announced a Micromanager Editor to allow sophisticated users to alter strategies that the computer manager used. They made the programming for the Micromanager Editor available. It was a detailed computer mapping of every baseball strategy using their own made-up computer language called *Baseball Talk*.

As an ex-programmer, I was in heaven, and created many of my own custom managers, a few to model playing APBA-ball and using BBA rules modifications. Shortly after that the BBA converted to a hybrid league where you could play your home games using BBW or roll the dice with the basic game. Of course, we still played with written instructions from the visiting manager, so the Micromanager was never used, other than for my solo replays. However, I was one of a handful, at the time, who opted to play our games via computer and BBW.

In 1998, our existing commissioner wanted to step down and asked me to relieve him as the commissioner of the league. I did so and have been our commissioner since then.

My oldest son joined the league in 2002 renaming his team the Alpharetta Juggernauts, and adding spice to the twice-yearly Alpharetta vs. Tuxford series. Alpharetta was the BBA champion in 2018.

In 2008, our league expanded again, from 20 teams to 24 teams, and I established the rules and ran our expansion draft.

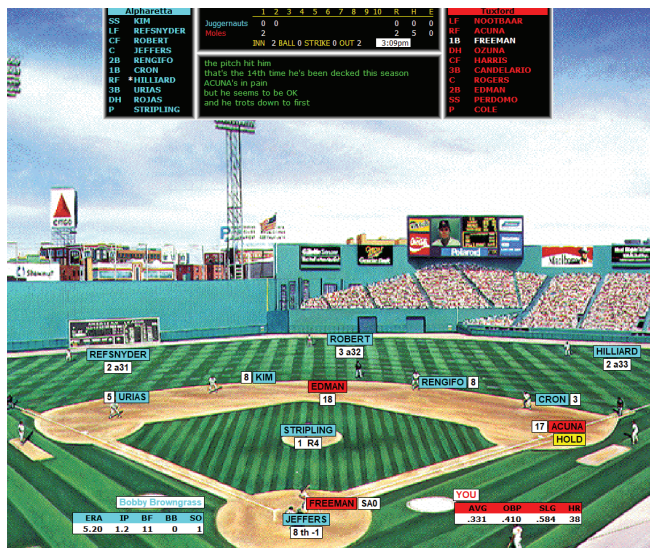
APBA itself experienced some changes. In 2009 John Herson purchased APBA and in 2011 moved the company from Lancaster, Pennsylvania to Alpharetta.

For grins, here is my All-Moles Career Team:

Catcher – Brian Downing
Hit 250 home runs for the Moles, 14 years on the team.

First base - Eddie Murray
An MLB Hall of Famer, he played in 2,326 games for the Moles over 15 years with a slash line of .283/.360/.505 over that time.

Second base – Lou Whitaker
Slick fielder who played in 1,613 games for the Moles over 11 years.



An APBA Baseball for Windows (BBW) game in progress, with Moles batting and Juggernauts fielding at Fenway. Photo: author.

Third base – Kevin Seitzer
Only 7 years with the Moles, but in 6th place for career on-base-average (.353).

Shortstop – Orlando Cabrera
Played 11 seasons for us in 1,414 games. Third in career stolen bases (430).

Outfield – Larry Walker
MLB Hall of Famer. 15 seasons with the Moles with 1,992 games played. Career slash of .295/.372/.542 and fourth in career stolen bases (331).

Outfield – Sammy Sosa
Played 12 seasons and 1,767 games for the Moles. Career leader in Moles HRs with 499. Hit 74 for us in 2000.

Outfield – Luis Gonzalez
Played 14 seasons and 1,979 games for the Moles. Hit 272 homers (5th all time).

DH – Adrian Gonzalez
14 seasons, 2,010 games. Fourth in career HRs (308).

Starter #1 – Roger Clemens
19 seasons, 569 starts, W/L record of 300-162.

Starter #2 – Bob Welch
15 seasons, 425 starts, W/L record of 214-130.

Starter #3 – Jared Weaver
11 seasons, 292 starts, W/L record of 142-96.

Starter #4 – Jordan Zimmermann
9 seasons, 229 starts, W/L record of 105-78.

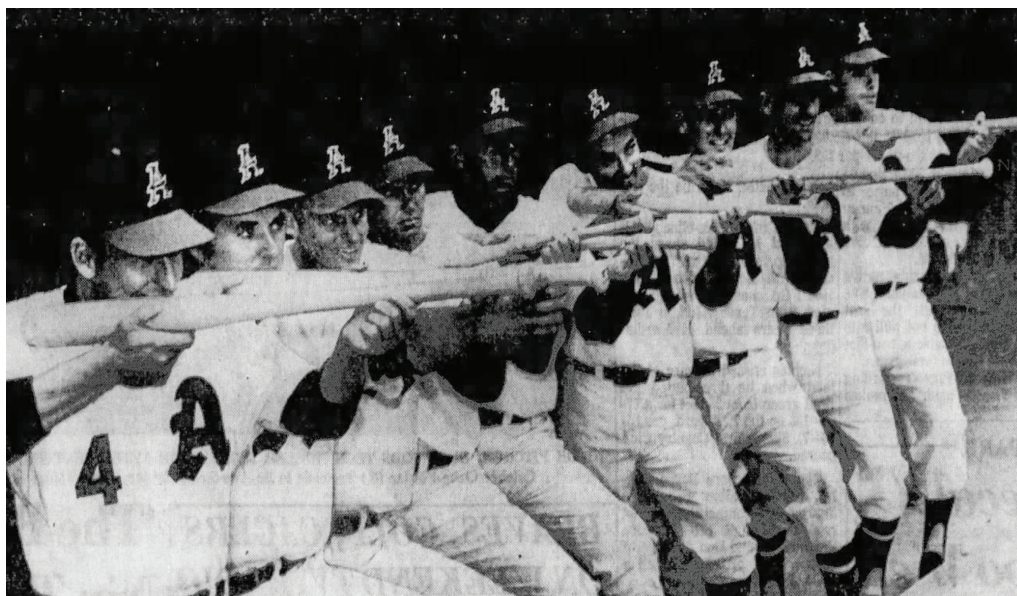
Closer – Kenley Jansen
11 seasons, 534 games, 157 saves, 2.72 ERA.

Set up – Craig Kimbrel
9 seasons, 480 games, 2.49 ERA.

Set up – Luke Gregerson
9 seasons, 441 games, 2.71 ERA.

Yes, I track single season individual and team records, as well as career stats for all my Moles. Through the 2023 BBA season, 445 players have appeared in a Moles “uniform.” The Moles won-loss record over all my years in the league is 3,799 – 3,501 (for a .520 winning percentage).

In 2024, we hope to contend for another division title, relying on hitters such as Ronald Acuna, Freddie Freeman, Michael Harris, Marcel Ozuna, and Lars Nootbaar and a pitching staff led by Gerrit Cole, Kyle Bradish, Jose Berrios, and Bobby Miller. ♦



The Atlanta Crackers of 1965 pose at Atlanta Stadium as they prepare for the opening game of the season. From left: Ernie Bowman, Tim Harkness, Adrian Garrett, Jim McKnight, Gene Stephens, Bubba Phillips, Woody Woodard, Ed Sadowski and Dick Kelly. Photo: The Atlanta Constitution, April 17, 1965. Photographer: Marion Crowe.

The tables throughout this article, like the one below, detail key players from each AAA season, including their major-league appearances before, during, and after each specific season. The last column lists career World Series appearances.

STATISTICAL STUDY

Shooting for the Show: the Triple-A Crackers

A quick look at the rosters of the Atlanta Crackers during their four-year existence in the Triple-A International League, 1962 to 1965.

BY CRAIG BROWN, member of SABR Magnolia

In the photo above, nine baseball players from 1965 pose on the dugout steps at brand-new Atlanta Stadium. With their bats they take aim, literally, at winning that year's International League championship.

However, they were also taking aim at their baseball future and the ultimate goal: to play in the major leagues. On those dugout steps, they were seemingly just one step away.

I was curious. How many of these men actually made it? How many realized their dream of a long-term major-league career? How many had only the proverbial "cup of coffee?" And how many never made it at all?

Let's take a closer look at these final four years of Atlanta Crackers history...utilizing a Q&A format.

During the International League years, which Cracker went on to play the most MLB games?

The answer is Tim McCarver ('62), who played 1,877 games after leaving Atlanta. The 2x NL all-star spent time in St. Louis, of course, but

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Tim McCarver, 1962 Topps baseball card.

1962 Atlanta Crackers • St. Louis affiliate							
Manager	W	L	PCT	MLB Games Managed			
				Before 1962	After	1962	WS
Joe Schultz•	83	71	.539	0	0	191	0
Catcher	GP	AVG	HR	MLB Games Played			
				Before 1962	After	1962	WS
Tim McCarver•	116	.275	11	32	0	1877	21
First Base							
Jim Baumer•	93	.254	5	18	0	0	0
Second Base							
Phil Gagliano•	143	.284	6	0	0	702	4
Shortstop							
Jerry Buchek•	69	.192	8	31	0	390	4
Daryl Robertson•	64	.194	5	0	9	0	0
Third Base							
Joe Morgan	142	.279	16	85	3	0	0
Ron Plaza•	100	.191	1	0	0	0	0
Outfield							
Bob Burda	122	.303	10	0	7	381	0
Angel Scull•	70	.324	5	0	0	0	0
Mike Shannon•	66	.260	6	0	10	872	21
Starters	GP/GS	W	L	MLB Games Pitched			
				Before 1962	After	1962	WS
Harry Fanok	29/28	12	10	0	0	16	0
Bob Sadowski•	33/27	10	12	0	0	115	0
Johnny Kucks•	29/24	14	7	207	0	0	8
Paul Toth•	27/14	6	7	0	12	31	0
Bullpen							
Harold Dietz	40/16	3	11	0	0	0	0
Lee Gregory	38/18	9	7	0	0	11	0

also in Philadelphia, Montreal and Boston, 21 years in total. He had a career batting average of .271, and oddly led the NL in triples in 1966, besting both Brock and Clemente that year.

Which other Crackers had MLB careers of note?

Only three other men from this four-year period played in more than 1,000 MLB games after Atlanta: outfielder Bill Robinson ('65), shortstop Sandy Alomar, Sr. ('65) and catcher Randy Hundley ('64). All recognizable names.

Robinson (1,472 MLB games) was Braves property until he was traded for Clete Boyer in 1966. He was most noted for his time with Pittsburgh in the late 1970s and as a coach with the Mets in the mid-1980s.

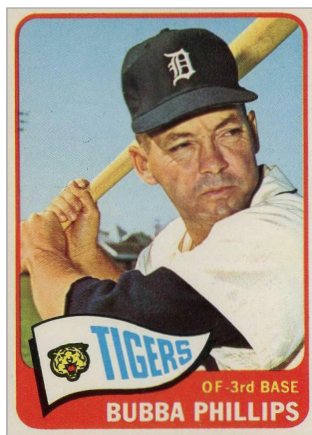
Alomar (1,395 MLB games after Atl) was traded to Houston before finding success with the Angels in the early 1970s. According to *mlb.com*, the Sandy Sr.-Roberto father-son combo was the eighth most productive in baseball history, based on WAR.

Hundley (1,059 games after Atl) was a fan favorite with the Cub faithful in Chicago between 1966 and 1970 and was one of the first to catch one-handed, even before Johnny Bench.

Who had the most MLB experience prior to coming to Atlanta?

This question intrigues me because baseball was different in the early 1960s. A robust draft system was not yet in place and minor league teams were typically not stacked with prospects. Clubs signed veteran players to fill-out their roster, players in their 30s still looking for another chance to go back up — or to make a decent paycheck. AAA paid far better than driving a truck.

One such player was third baseman Bubba Phillips ('65) who at age 35 came to Atlanta.



Bubba Phillips, 1964 Topps baseball card.

Phillips played 1,062 games with Chicago AL, Cleveland and lastly Detroit, between 1955 and 1964. He was released by the Tigers in February 1965 and Atlanta GM Eddie Glennon grabbed him up quick. Bubba was the everyday third baseman for the Crackers, but his one year with the team would be his last as a pro.

Second in previous games played was outfielder Gene Stephens ('65) who played 964 games for Boston, Baltimore, KC and Chicago AL. Stephens was a spry 32 years old when he came to the Crackers in '65. He went to Japan in 1966 and hung 'em up after the 1967 season.

The 1965 team, with prospects Robinson and Alomar and veterans Phillips and Stephens, was certainly the most diverse team of the four when it came to a mix of young and old. Here's a summary of MLB games played by year:

1962 Crackers (83-71)

- 31% played a previous game
- 63% played a future game

1963 Crackers (85-68)

- 46% played a previous game
- 62% played a future game

1964 Crackers (55-93)

- 42% played a previous game
- 53% played a future game

1965 Crackers (83-64)

- 78% played a previous game
- 67% played a future game

1963 Atlanta Crackers • St. Louis affiliate							
Manager	W	L	PCT	MLB Games Managed			
				Before 1963	After	WS	WS
Harry Walker•	85	68	.557	118	0	1117	0
Catcher	GP	AVG	HR	MLB Games Played			
				Before 1963	After	WS	WS
Dave Ricketts•	132	.278	5	0	3	127	4
First Base							
Joe Morgan	131	.281	12	85	3	0	0
Jeoff Long	86	.274	5	0	5	51	0
Second Base							
Phil Gagliano•	124	.242	5	0	10	692	4
Jack Damaska	80	.284	5	0	5	0	0
Shortstop							
Jerry Buchek•	153	.287	10	31	3	387	4
Third Base							
Jack Kubiszyn	134	.294	2	50	0	0	0
Outfield							
Doug Clemens	153	.278	13	55	5	392	0
Johnny Lewis•	136	.280	13	0	0	266	0
Ron Cox•	62	.243	1	0	0	0	0
Starters	GP/GS	W	L	MLB Games Pitched			
				Before 1963	After	WS	WS
Johnny Kucks•	30/29	14	9	207	0	0	8
Harvey Branch	32/28	10	9	1	0	0	0
Lee Gregory	28/25	8	13	0	0	11	0
Bullpen							
none qualified							

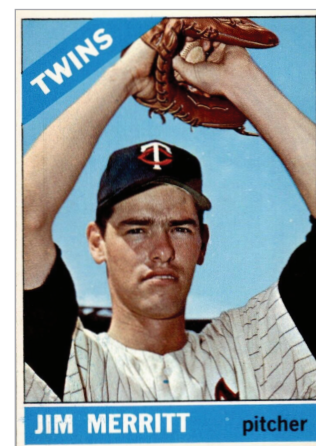
As you can see, the 1962 team, the one that won the IL championship and the Jr. World Series, was the least experienced of the four. From that team, player-coach Joe Morgan ('62, '63) had previously played the most in the bigs, but only in 85 games in total with four different teams before Atlanta.

On the pitching side, who appeared in the most MLB games after Atlanta?

Interestingly, in the four years the Crackers played at the Triple-A level, the team had seemingly only one true pitching prospect, left handed starter Jim Merritt ('64). This was during the Twins' one-year association with Atlanta

and Merritt went on to make the Minnesota club for their pennant-winning season the

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Jim Merritt, 1966 Topps baseball card.

following year. However, he pitched in only 297 MLB games in total. He had two very good years for Sparky Anderson's Reds in '69 and '70, but arm troubles ended his career early. 1974 was his last year pitching, the same year that Tommy John surgery was introduced, performed on John, not Merritt.

Which Cracker from this period participated in the most World Series Games?

That's the ultimate goal, right? To win it all and jump up and down in the infield while wearing special caps. Well, back

then celebrations were different, players slapped each other on the back and ran to the dugout.

Our friend McCarver played in the most World Series games, 21 in total, along with outfielder Mike Shannon ('62). These two played in every game of the '64, '67 and '68 World Series for St. Louis. McCarver also was in the broadcast booth for an additional 24 series, from 1985 to 2013 with ABC, CBS and Fox.

Fifteen Crackers in total from the AAA period participated in a World Series game at some point in their career. Among these were the

forementioned Bubba Phillips, who played in three World Series games for the White Sox in 1959, and Jim Merritt, who pitched in three series games for the Reds in 1970. In both cases, no ring.

Pitcher Johnny Kucks ('62, '63) was the first AAA-Cracker to play in a World Series, two in fact with the Yankees in 1956 and 1958, New York winning both. Seven of the fifteen Crackers who did appear in a series game realized a championship:

Triple-A Crackers who were World Series Winners

- Johnny Kucks 1956, 1958
- Jerry Buchek 1964
- Tim McCarver 1964, 1967
- Mike Shannon 1964, 1967
- Phil Gagliano 1967
- Dave Ricketts 1967
- Bill Robinson 1979

Griffith on June 21. McKeon put the blame on the Crackers' front office and assistant GM Dick King, saying "every time I wanted a good veteran ball player, King would say he's no good." As the losses mounted, McKeon saw King trying to manage the team. "He has had the nerve to call in players and tell them how they are pitching wrong."

McKeon survived his Atlanta experience to manage 2,041 major-league games. He started his pro career as a catcher in the Pirates organization in 1949 and became a player-manager at Class-B level in 1955. He was only 33 years old when he managed the Crackers in 1964. He later found a home in the Royals organization when the franchise was established in 1969 and was the Kansas

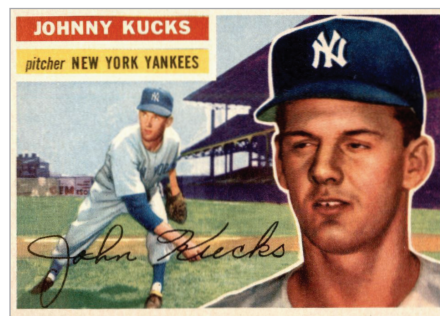
City manager from 1973 to 1975. However, he was replaced with Whitey Herzog in the middle of the '75 season, a trend that would follow McKeon at every stop.

He managed Oakland in 1977 but owner Charlie Finley replaced

him in mid-season, then reinstated him in the middle of the following season. McKeon was the GM in San Diego, then

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1964 Atlanta Crackers • Minnesota affiliate							
	W	L	PCT	MLB Games Managed			
				Before	1964	After	WS
Manager							
Jack McKeon	19	42	.312	0	0	2041	6
Pete Appleton	36	51	.414	0	0	0	0
				MLB Games Played			
				Before	1964	After	WS
Catcher							
Randy Hundley	113	.217	13	0	2	1059	0
First Base							
Ray Jablonski	87	.192	4	812	0	0	0
Ray Looney	70	.250	11	0	0	0	0
Second Base							
Jim Snyder	82	.264	1	15	26	0	0
Shortstop							
Marty Martinez	128	.201	1	37	0	399	0
Bud Bloomfield	61	.217	0	1	7	0	0
Third Base							
Ed Olivares	110	.225	15	24	0	0	0
Ray Bellino	93	.196	1	0	0	0	0
Outfield							
Sandy Valdespino	147	.337	16	0	0	382	5
Tony Washington	126	.239	6	0	0	0	0
Joe Nossek	113	.238	8	0	7	288	6
Chuck Weathersp'n	106	.246	11	0	0	0	0
				MLB Games Pitched			
				Before	1964	After	WS
Starters							
Jim Merritt	36/29	13	17	0	0	297	3
Dwight Siebler	29/25	7	12	7	9	32	0
Chuck Nieson	36/24	4	17	0	2	0	0
Mel Nelson	24/23	9	12	38	0	55	1
Bullpen							
Don Williams	57/9	6	7	3	0	0	0
Jim Rantz	47/0	2	3	0	0	0	0
Pete Cimino	35/12	3	6	0	0	86	0

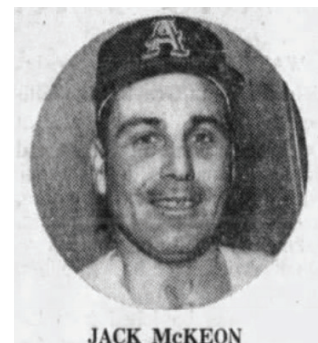


Johnny Kucks, 1956 Topps baseball card.

The Crackers had a few notable managers in those four AAA seasons: Joe Schultz, Harry Walker and Jack McKeon. So, who managed the most in the big leagues?

The answer, McKeon ('64). The Twins-fed team of 1964 was the inverse of several very good years with St. Louis. The Crackers finished dead last in the IL in 1964 with a 55-93 record, 32.5 games behind Jacksonville. It was also the last season at Ponce de Leon Park, home of the Crackers since 1907.

McKeon managed the first 61 games in 1964 before being fired by Twins owner Clark



Jack McKeon as manager of the 1964 Crackers.

took over as manager, only to be ousted by the owner in the middle of the 1990 season. Next was Cincinnati where he replaced Ray Knight during the 1997 season and was then fired at the end of the 2000 season.

McKeon's final job, of course, was with the Florida Marlins where he won the World Series in 2003. That year, McKeon was again the replacement, taking the reins from Jeff Torborg in May. McKeon was a big-league manager in four decades: '70s, '80s, '90s and '00s.

Second place in MLB games managed goes to Harry "The Hat" Walker ('63), who skippered 8 years and 1,117 MLB games with Pittsburgh and Houston after Atlanta. Walker was a Cardinals man through and through. After nine years playing for St. Louis, he managed in the Branch Rickey farm system at Columbus (AAA), Rochester (AAA) and Houston (AA) between the years 1951 and 1958. He then went back to St. Louis to coach.

Harry begrudgingly returned to minor-league managing in 1963 and led the Crackers to a first-place tie with Indianapolis, only to lose in a 1-game playoff with the Indians, and then fall to Indy again in the playoffs.

Soon after, St. Louis left town. The reason? The Cardinals wanted a team in

Tulsa, according to Cracker President Bill McKechnie, who quickly welcomed an offer from Minnesota. Interestingly, Tulsa was late on building a new baseball park, so the Cards found a temporary 2-year home in Jacksonville. Walker stayed on as manager and led the AAA Suns to the 1964 IL title with some of the players from the '63 Crackers: Dave Ricketts, Joe Morgan, Phil Gagliano, Jack Damaska and Johnny Lewis.

Here's the million-dollar question. Who played the most games for the AAA Crackers without ever making it to the big leagues?

Amongst position players, the honor goes to outfielder-first baseman Tony Washington ('64), who played 126 games for Atlanta during the single year of Twins affiliation. Washington had a 10-year career, playing in 1,040 minor-league games. His playing days included six seasons and 448 games at the AAA level in the Pirates, Indians, Braves and Twins organizations, but he saw no action in the big leagues.

The Crackers purchased Washington in late April 1964 from AAA Toronto to satisfy a "desperate need for left-handed hitting," but he hit only .236 with 6 homers.

Not surprisingly, the '64 team had the fewest everyday players to appear in at least one MLB game. Here's the breakdown:

1962 Crackers (83-71)

- 81% played one MLB game

1963 Crackers (85-68)

- 92% played one MLB game

1964 Crackers (55-93)

- 79% played one MLB game

1965 Crackers (83-64)

- 100% played one MLB game

Tony Washington batted lead-off and played left field in the final game at "Old Poncey" on September 10, 1964, versus none other than Harry Walker

1965 Atlanta Crackers • Milwaukee affiliate							
Manager	W	L	PCT	MLB Games Managed			
				Before	1965	After	WS
Bill Adair•	83	64	.565	0	0	10	0
Catcher	GP	AVG	HR	MLB Games Played			
				Before	1965	After	WS
Bob Barton•	105	.289	7	0	0	393	0
First Base				Before	1965	After	WS
Tim Harkness	133	.246	13	259	0	0	0
Second Base				Before	1965	After	WS
Tommie Aaron•	114	.284	4	213	8	216	0
Shortstop				Before	1965	After	WS
Ernie Bowman•	111	.283	0	165	0	0	0
Sandy Alomar	66	.243	0	19	67	1395	0
Third Base				Before	1965	After	WS
Bubba Phillips•	111	.230	4	1062	0	0	3
Outfield				Before	1965	After	WS
Bill Robinson•	133	.268	10	0	0	1472	7
Adrian Garrett•	128	.224	20	0	0	163	0
Jim McKnight•	96	.252	6	63	0	0	0
Jim Beauchamp•	88	.259	13	27	28	338	4
Gene Stephens•	78	.288	6	964	0	0	0
Starters	GP/GS	W	L	MLB Games Pitched			
				Before	1965	After	WS
Larry Maxie	28/26	7	13	0	0	2	0
Arnold Umbach•	31/26	13	10	1	0	22	0
Dan Schneider	43/23	10	7	43	0	74	0
Dick Kelley•	14/14	11	2	2	21	165	0
Bullpen				Before	1965	After	WS
Chi-Chi Olivo•	49/0	9	2	41	8	47	0
Jack Smith•	45/7	8	6	34	0	0	0
Dave Ellers	45/0	11	2	6	17	58	0

and the Jacksonville Suns. Tony made this game, an 11 to 5 loss, his last. He was still in his prime, just 27 years old, when he quit his pro career.

Only 634 watched from the stands that night. 83-year-old Branch Rickey was there, back with the Cardinals front office and watching his AAA Suns with "parental admiration."

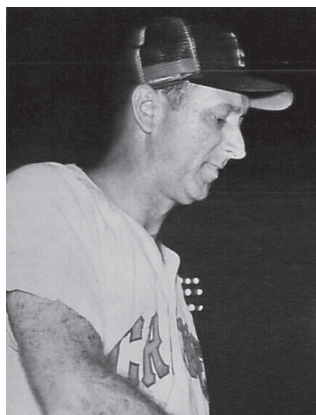
Later, the remnants of Hurricane Dora arrived to rain out the final scheduled game the following night, Friday, September 11, 1964.

The next season, 1965, was the last chapter in the Crackers'

story, the team now playing in new Atlanta Stadium, built for the arrival of the Braves. Opening day was April 17, 1965. The Crackers defeated Rochester 3 to 2 in front of 5,383 -- in a stadium that seated over 52,000.

A few days earlier, nine men posed with bats as rifles on the dugout steps, taking aim at the age-old dream of playing in the major leagues. ♦

The statistics for this exercise were derived from baseball-reference.com and statscrew.com. A dot following a name in a table indicates that the player is deceased.



Harry Walker as manager of the 1963 Crackers.

BIOGRAPHY

The story of Braves #1 pick, Preston Hanna

BY SAM GAZDZIAK, *ripbaseball.com*
and long-distance member of SABR Magnolia

The first amateur player draft took place in 1965. Like all teams, the Braves have had their share of home runs and strikeouts over the years. The 1970s saw Atlanta draft Murphy and Horner, and also Preston Hanna, whose playing days were filled with more than baseball. Hanna died last November at age 69. Here's his story from Sam Gazdziak as originally published at ripbaseball.com.

—C.B.

RIP to Preston Hanna, a former #1 draft pick and a major-league pitcher for 8 seasons. He died on November 20, 2023, at the age of 69. Hanna pitched for the Atlanta Braves (1975-82) and Oakland Athletics (1982).

Preston Lee Hanna was born in Pensacola, FL, on September 10, 1954. He was a very good football player in high school and was even recruited by Alabama coach Paul “Bear” Bryant as a defensive back. However, his skill at pitching was apparent. As a senior at Escambia High School in Pensacola, Hanna turned in a 13-0 record with a 0.88 ERA. He struck out 160 batters and walked just 58.

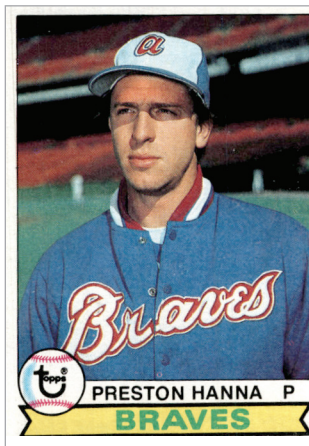
He credited his coach, former major-league pitcher Fred Waters, with his development. The Atlanta Braves drafted Hanna in the First Round of the 1972 June Amateur Draft — he was the eleventh overall player taken. “If I can continue to improve, I feel like I can make it to the top in a short time,” he said. “Of all the teams in the majors, being drafted by Atlanta probably was the best thing that could

have happened to me.” With the Braves being the only Southern team in baseball at the time, it was practically Hanna’s hometown ballclub.

Waters had told Hanna not to settle for less than a \$40,000 bonus, and negotiations got a little contentious when the Braves tried to low-ball the young pitcher. He held out for the good of his family. Hanna’s father William was injured during World War II and was unable to work, and his mother Lacy had been a civil service employee for 25 years, supporting the family. “If she had to work much longer, she’d have died. I know it,” Hanna later said. After some negotiations, Hanna signed with the Braves for a bonus of \$40,000, a quarter of which went



A photo from Preston Hanna’s day with the Atlanta media after signing his first contract two months shy of his 18th birthday. Here he admires a Warren Spahn uniform at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium. Photo: The Atlanta Constitution, July 1, 1972. Photographer, Bud Skinner.



Preston Hanna, 1979 Topps baseball card.

to his family, and reported to the team’s Appalachian League club in Wythville, VA.

Like many young pitchers, Hanna had to learn control. He walked 25 batters in 36 innings at Wythville (along with 42 strikeouts) and ended up with a 6.50 ERA in 8 starts. He worked on a changeup over the off-season and improved with Class-A Greenwood in 1973, with an 8-11 record and a 3.55 ERA. He won 11 games for Double-A Savannah in 1974 and was also the winning pitcher in the Southern League’s All-Star Game.

Hanna made his first trip to the majors in September 1975 after a 10-10 record for Triple-A Richmond. He was 8-1 at one point in the season, but then Richmond manager Clint Courtney died on June 16, and the team went into a tailspin. He debuted with 2 scoreless innings in a 6-0 loss against Los Angeles on September 13. His first strikeout was opposing pitcher Andy Messersmith. With the Braves, Hanna appeared as a mop-up reliever in 4 games and allowed a run in 5-2/3 innings. He fanned 2 batters but walked 5, hit 2 and threw a wild pitch.

He struggled with Richmond in 1976, with arm problems early in the

Career Stats

	IP	W-L	BB	SO	WHIP
Atlanta					
1975	5.2	0-0	5	2	2.1
1976	8.0	0-0	4	3	1.9
1977	60.0	2-6	34	37	1.7
1978	140.1	7-13	93	90	1.6
1979	24.1	1-1	15	15	1.7
1980	79.1	2-0	44	35	1.4
1981	35.1	2-1	23	22	1.8
1982	84.1	3-0	28	17	1.8
Oakland					
1982	48.1	0-4	33	32	1.8
8 yrs. 437.1 17-25 279 253 1.7					

season and a demotion to the bullpen when he pitched poorly. However, Hanna did well as a reliever and was brought back to Atlanta in September once again. He made 5 appearances and pitched well in 4 of them. The fifth, against the Giants, was the one game where his control deserted him, and he gave up 4 runs on 4 hits and a couple of walks in 2-1/3 innings. He was left with a 4.50 ERA in 8 innings as a result.

Hanna pitched badly enough in Richmond in 1977 that he was sent down to Double-A Savannah. He rebounded there and was brilliant over the rest of the season, and then he struck out 10 in the Southern League championship game to give Savannah the win. The Braves rewarded him with another trip to the majors, and Hanna was aware of the significance of his third stint in the majors. “No, I don’t feel this is my last shot at the majors, but it could be with the Braves if I don’t cut it this time,” he told *The Pensacola News* in late July.

He was effective enough in a few relief outings and was given his first major-league start on August 11 against San Diego. He threw shutout baseball for 8 innings and took a 1-0 lead into the ninth inning, but he allowed a solo homer to Jerry Turner and a bases-loaded walk to Pat Scanlon in the bottom of the inning to take the hard-luck

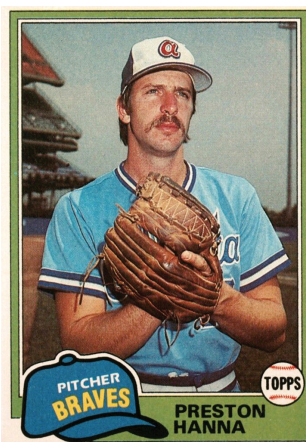
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2-1 loss. He earned a spot in the Braves rotation as a result, but it was his best start of the year. He picked up a couple of wins but lost 6 starts and finished the year with a 2-6 record and 4.95 ERA.

Hanna approached 1978 with the goal of staying with the Braves until July. Manager Bobby Cox saw bigger things for the young pitcher. “I think Preston’s arrived... He’s the kind you can count on to give you a good effort every time,” Cox said. Hanna took advantage of a weak-hitting Giants team and picked up a couple of early wins against them, including a combined 1-hit shutout with reliever Adrian Devine. It was the start of a very streaky season. Hanna won 6 of his first 7 decisions, and by the middle of June he was 6-1 with a 3.07 ERA and looked like a potential All-Star. Then he lost 12 of his next 13 decisions to finish the year with a 7-13 record and a 5.13 ERA. He had 90 strikeouts and 93 walks in 140-1/3 innings. Still, he was the second-busiest pitcher on the Braves behind Phil Niekro and had the second-most wins on the staff behind the knuckleballer’s 19 victories.

The cause of Hanna’s struggles became clear when his season ended early, thanks to surgery for a torn lower lateral ligament in his right elbow. The *Pensacola Journal* reported that Atlanta doctors essentially rebuilt his elbow. Hanna provided the commentary — skip the rest of this paragraph if you’re squeamish: “[The doctors] had to drill two holes in my arm. That surprised them because the bone structure in my arm was so good. Then, they put a piece of artificial ligament in my arm. That is doing all the work now. They also had to move my ‘funny bone’ around and sand down my elbow to reduce friction.”

Doctors thought Hanna would miss the 1979 season, but he was activated by the



Preston Hanna, 1981 Topps baseball card.

Braves in July and immediately put to work by Cox. He pitched sporadically for the rest of the season, making a total of 6 appearances, including 4 starts. He picked up his first win in more than a year on September 6 as he pitched 7 innings of 1-run ball in a 6-2 win over the Dodgers. The performance — his final one of 1979 — lowered his ERA to 2.96.

Problems between Hanna and the Braves arose in 1980. The pitcher was one of four players fined \$50 by Cox for skipping a booster club meeting. Team owner Ted Turner raised the fines to \$500, spurring the players to file a grievance. Then Hanna, who had moved to the bullpen, was hit on the foot with a line drive on May 21 and missed nearly a month. During the time he was injured, The *Atlanta Constitution* ran a report stating that the Braves had forced Hanna to take painkillers and other drugs throughout his career, against his will. “Sometimes the only way you can go in there [and play] is with shots,” he was quoted as saying. “The coaches can just look at you — telling you with their eyes to take it. Then they can deny everything. They can say they never said it.” Hanna also said that he had been taking phenylbutazone pills “like candy” and that they had affected his personality.

“I have had codeine pills, Percodan, Empirin 3. There’s an assortment they can give you for any occasion.”

Hanna immediately denied the report, and Cox dismissed it. “From anyone else I would be raving mad,” the manager said. “But from Preston, I just ignore it.”

Hanna pitched better after returning from the foot injury to finish with a couple of wins and a 3.18 ERA in 79-1/3 innings pitched. In the morning of August 18, Hanna was arrested in Atlanta after refusing to leave a nightclub. He was charged with public drunkenness after becoming “loud and abrasive,” according to reports. Nothing further was reported on it at the time. Hanna struggled through 1981 with a 6.37 ERA in 20 games, but he found a job during the players strike. He was hired to be a production assistant at CNN, which was owned by Ted Turner — which meant that Hanna was an employee of Turner’s at the same time he was striking against Turner! “Just like they say on their TV commercials, Ted is an equal opportunity employer,” Hanna said. “I guess this proves it.” The arrangement didn’t last long once word about the job got out.

Hanna’s season ended in late August after being placed on the disabled list with a pulled hamstring. He revealed in 1981 that the team had actually placed him into an alcohol rehabilitation clinic, and the hamstring was the public excuse for his unavailability. Hanna explained all that and more in July 1982, when he was released by the Braves. He said that the team has essentially forced him to go to rehab or be released, even though he or the rehab specialists didn’t feel that he had a drinking problem. “There’s not much you can do when they say if you don’t go, we’ll release you and nobody will pick you up,” Hanna said. The pitcher added

that other players and team executives drank more than he did, but they were not punished. He also alleged that the release was timed for a period in which Turner was in South America and otherwise unreachable. “I wonder if Ted knows about this,” Hanna said of his release. “Ted has been quoted in the newspapers as saying I’m one of his favorite players and wouldn’t be released. I think this is a vendetta to abolish me by some people in the front office, and they had to wait until Ted was out of the country to do it.”

At the time of the release, Hanna had a 3-0 record, a 3.75 ERA in 20 games and an ERA+ of 101, which meant that he was basically a league-average pitcher, if not a little above average. However, he had also walked 28 batters in 36 innings, including 9 in his last 3-2/3 innings pitched. Hanna wasn’t out of work long, as he signed with the Oakland A’s. He pitched for them for the rest of the season and had a 5.59 ERA over 23 games, including a couple of starts. He dropped his only 4 decisions with Oakland and walked one more batter (33) than he struck out (32). Hanna spent 1983 playing for the Triple-A affiliates for Oakland and Philadelphia, and it ended up being his final season of professional baseball.

Hanna spent parts of 8 seasons in the major leagues and had a 17-25 record and a 4.61 ERA. He pitched in 156 games and started 47 of them, with 2 complete games and 1 save. He struck out 253 batters and walked 279. He also batted .161 and hit a home run off Cardinals pitcher Silvio Martinez on June 13, 1978 in Atlanta.

Hanna returned to Pensacola after his playing career ended. He pitched in the Gulf Coast Amateur Baseball League in 1986. He did some youth coaching but began

CONTINUED

suffering from seizures and blackouts. He was eventually diagnosed with epilepsy, which forced him into early disability retirement. He coached his children's teams when he was able. "I can't coach full-time, and I have to stay out of the heat," he said in a 1990 interview. "I have to watch myself."

He enjoyed watching his children as they got involved in

youth sports, though. His son Warren was an award-winning catcher for Escambia High and spent a couple of seasons in the Cubs organization in the 2000s. "What it does, is it rejuvenates the feeling I used to get when I played," he said of being able to watch Warren play.

Hanna is survived by his wife Rita and children Caroline, Warren and Preston, as well as their families. ♦

BASEBALL PERSPECTIVES

The origins of today's draft

BY KARL GREEN, chair of the SABR Collegiate Baseball Committee and member of SABR Magnolia

The baseball draft, as we know it today, came about in 1965 for two reasons:

First, and most importantly, the draft represented the owner's attempt at solving the Bonus Baby problem which had seen unproven amateur players receiving higher and higher bonuses over the years. In 1964, Rick Reichardt received a bonus of \$205,000 and major league clubs spent \$7,000,000 on amateur players, more than was spent on major-league player salaries.¹ Before the draft, technically called the First Year Player Draft, amateurs had the opportunity to negotiate with as many teams as expressed an interest in their talent. Allowing an amateur player to negotiate with a single team, instead of 20, moved the salary leverage back into the hands of the owners.

Secondly, and more of a by-product than a goal, the draft levelled the talent acquisition field by preventing "rich" teams (Yankees, Dodgers) from gobbling much of the free-agent talent because they had more money to spend. (The owners can't help themselves, so over the years they've instituted draft pools and slotting of bonuses in addition to the capped pool for

international free-agent signings and most recently, the creation of nominally independent summer leagues as part of minor-league contraction.)

Although Rick Monday is known for being the first player chosen in the 1965 draft, a close look at the data shows that about 58% of the chosen players that year attended college (senior or junior) and 42% came straight from high school. By 1980, approximately 82% of the players chosen came from college (senior or junior) with only 18% drafted from high school. Those percentages hold true today.

Before the advent of the farm system in the 1920s, minor-league teams signed many of the high school and college players themselves. The National Association oversaw a draft by league classification with a fixed amount to be paid the team losing a player.

For example, if the Atlanta Crackers drafted a player from the Macon Peaches, they would pay \$250 to Macon. If the Athletics drafted a player from the Crackers, Atlanta only got \$750 or \$1,000. This led to teams selling players mid-season because they received a higher

Braves first draft picks, 1965-2000

Year	#Pick	Name	State	Level	Position	MLB GP
1965	12	Dick Grant	MA	h.s.	first base	0
GM: Paul Richards 1966-1972						
1966	11	Al Santorini	NJ	h.s.	pitcher	127
1967	12	Andy Finlay	CA	h.s.	outfield	0
1968	7	Curtis Moore	TX	h.s.	outfield	0
1969	12	Gene Holbert	PA	h.s.	catcher	0
1970	21	Ron Broaddus	TX	h.s.	pitcher	0
1971	10	Taylor Duncan	CA	h.s.	infield	112
GM: Eddie Robinson 1972-1976						
1972	11	Preston Hanna	FL	h.s.	pitcher	156
1973	10	Pat Rockett	TX	h.s.	infield	152
1974	5	Dale Murphy	OR	h.s.	catcher	2,180
1975	18	Donald Young	CA	h.s.	catcher	0
GM: Bill Lucas 1976-1979						
1976	3	Ken Smith	OH	h.s.	infield	83
1977	4	Tim Cole	NY	h.s.	pitcher	0
1978	1	Bob Horner	AZ	college	infield	1,020
GM: John Mullen 1979-1985						
1979	4	Brad Komminsk	OH	h.s.	outfield	376
1980	21	Ken Dayley	OR	college	pitcher	385
1981	12	Jay Roberts	WA	h.s.	outfield	0
1982	9	Duane Ward	NM	h.s.	pitcher	462
1983	74	Marty Clary	IL	college	pitcher	58
1984	19	Drew Denson	OH	h.s.	first base	16
1985	14	Tommy Greene	NC	h.s.	pitcher	119
GM: Bobby Cox 1985-1990						
1986	5	Kent Mercker	OH	h.s.	pitcher	692
1987	6	Derek Lilliquist	GA	college	pitcher	262
1988	3	Steve Avery	MI	h.s.	pitcher	297
1989	2	Tyler Houston	NV	h.s.	catcher	700
GM: John Schuerholz 1990-2004						
1990	1	Chipper Jones	FL	h.s.	infield	2,499
1991	2	Mike Kelly	AZ	college	outfield	327
1992	21	Jamie Arnold	FL	h.s.	pitcher	50
1993	66	Andre King	FL	h.s.	outfield	0
1994	27	Jacob Shumate	SC	h.s.	pitcher	0
1995	26	Chad Hutchinson	CA	h.s.	pitcher	3
1996	27	A.J. Zapp	IN	h.s.	first base	0
1997	29	Troy Cameron	FL	h.s.	infield	0
1998	52	Matt Belisle	TX	h.s.	pitcher	693
1999	81	Matt Butler	MS	h.s.	pitcher	0
2000	29	Adam Wainwright	GA	h.s.	pitcher	478

price than the draft permitted.

This system ended in the 1920s, which is one reason Lefty Grove spent 4 seasons with Baltimore in AAA before Connie Mack finally acquired him. Baltimore's owner wouldn't sell Grove.

The other "draft" reform was the institution of today's Rule 5 Draft. Started after Baltimore wouldn't sell Grove to a major-league club, and other lesser-known players were stuck with

their minor league teams, it was instituted so that major-league caliber players could eventually reach their goal of playing in the majors.

Although the Rule 5 Draft remains today, the advent of expansion accompanied by the shrinkage of the minor leagues after 1960 eliminated much of the problem of players spending multiple years at AA or AAA, unable to climb the final rung.

♦

¹ The History and Future of the Amateur Draft; John Manuel, *The Baseball Research Journal*, Summer 2010, p61.

Last Page Pics: SABR Day 2024



Pictures from SABR Day in Atlanta on February 3, 2024. The day featured an interview with AJC Atlanta Braves beat-writer Justin Toscano conducted by chapter member Aaron Hill (top left), and Baseball Jeopardy by chapter member Dave Washburn (bottom right).

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Issue 2 • Fall 2023

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