

Tom Hafey
interviewed by Dave Heller
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Q: How did you get started in your baseball career, and how did you end up with the Browns?

A: I started out here. My brother was with the Missions in the Pacific Coast League, and I started in 1934. He was there in 1932, I believe. My cousin Chick, of course, played with the Cardinals. Then I just followed it along, and that was it. I didn't go to the Browns; I was sold in, I guess, 1941 or 1942. I went to San Antonio, which was a farm (team) for the St. Louis Browns. Then in the middle of the year, they needed somebody up in St. Louis and Toledo, but they made me stay where I was. So I just got mad, came home, and was going to join the fire department. It was during the war. So I just got mad and came home.

Q: So then they called you back up there in 1944?

A: Yeah, they called me in 1944 and wanted to know what my status was. And I said, "Well, I was working the shipyard and I was 4-F." Well, they said, "Well, do you want to come back? And if you're 4-F in 1944, why don't you come back here?" So I went back. And really, it was not, as far as salaries and things, it wasn't the greatest team or whatever in the world. They didn't pay that well. Then I guess it was the first week of August, which had to be the last time you could make a trade, I was traded to Washington, and Tom Turner, who was with the White Sox, was coming over to St. Louis. And the White Sox were to get a player from whoever. I don't know who it was going to be from. And I was not happy with that trade going to Washington.

Q: Did you just want to play the rest of the year in St. Louis because you were doing so well or just got used to it there?

A: No, I was just pinch-hitting. I just didn't want to go to Washington. It was during the war, if you remember, and what happened, they had quite a few of the Cuban and Puerto Rican players over there. I talked to (Gene) Moore, one of our outfielders who came from Washington. He said tell them you want an extra \$5,000, and you'll go over there, which I did. And they said no way. And then at the same time, I got a notice from the draft board in California — you've had it, come back to California. So that was the end of my time with the Browns.

Q: And did you play in baseball after that, or did you hang up the spikes?

A: Yeah, I signed with Oakland out there later on and played through 1948 under Casey Stengel.

Q: That must have been interesting.

A: It was fine. But you know, the Browns, I think, just treated me rotten. As a matter of fact, they voted me (for a World Series share). The players told me, I talked to Vern Stephens out here that winter. He said we voted you a half-share. I said, but I only got a quarter of a share.

Q: What happened there? Was it the Browns or the league office, how did that work?

A: Upstairs in the Browns' office, (Bill) DeWitt, and the group. And then, I think, half a share wasn't an awful lot, but as I say, they only gave me a quarter of a share. And then they gave me that in government bonds. In other words, instead of \$500 cash, they gave me a \$500 bond.

Q: Right, so it wasn't worth as much.

A: No, it wasn't. And you know I had been doing real well with them, pinch hitting, I played first base, the outfield, third base. Won a couple of games for them. Two to one ballgames, we beat Cleveland, then I beat Detroit. I come out here in Oakland and got more money than I got with St. Louis.

Q: Were salaries generally low or was it because of the war?

A: They didn't make very much money back there, that's what they claim anyway. DeWitt was from the Branch Rickey era, so that tells you that. But that's about all I can say. I hit well enough and played well enough.

Q: In that era, was it tougher to crack the majors because there weren't as many teams as there are now?

A: I went back there, they sent me money for train fare and everything. Then when I decided I wasn't going to go to Washington, they wouldn't pay my way home. But I went over there, when I went there, they called me on the phone. When they found out I was 4-F, they were very anxious for me to get back there.

Q: And you didn't want to go back because they already tried to trade you?

A: Well, I don't know. Baseball at that time was really not that great. And then I had to pinch hit against a couple of pretty good pitchers. Joe Page and Hal Newhouser. It was tough playing there in St. Louis. I don't regret it, but I wasn't happy with it. But that's all I can say.

Q: Was it tough being a pinch hitter, a part-timer?

A: Yeah, but it doesn't happen that way, you know.

Q: Do you remember any of the players, any insights?

A: Oh, I knew all of them. It was just a case where I hung out with Vern Stephens, (Frank) Mancuso. At that time, some of the players were older than I was at that time. So, and they, (Gene) Moore and (George) McQuinn and them, they kind of hung out by themselves.

Q: They were more of the quiet types.

A: George was very nice, very nice. The players were all very nice, really. Most of my trouble was up with the front office.

Q: What was the manager like, Luke Sewell?

A: You can have him.

Q: Was he a tough guy as a manager?

A: No, but he played too many favorites. I mean, I'm hitting good, pinch hitting and everything. Well, they brought in a left-handed first baseman and (Frank) Demaree who had been with the Giants when I was over there. And these guys didn't hit anything. So I don't see where they gained anything, that's the point I bring up.

Q: They brought a lot of outfielders in that year, it seems.

A: They brought in (Len) Shulte, he was an infielder, and then the first baseman, (Mike) Chartak, I think his name was. Frank Demaree was an outfielder. In those, I don't know, they enjoyed doing their thing I guess. And they had, at the end of the season, they had four catchers. They had Mancuso, (Red) Hayworth, (Tom) Turner, and Joe Schmidt (Schultz). Of course, they weren't all eligible for the World Series. I don't think Turner was even eligible for the World Series. That's why I couldn't think why they brought him over.

Q: Did Chick teach you any of his old tricks?

A: Those are some things that come naturally in baseball, being able to hit, playing the game. Baseball today is a big joke. These guys go out and the pitchers pitch five innings. Eddie Joost, he had a night in San Francisco and we were talking about it and they asked him a bunch of questions. One of the questions was how come the pitchers only pitch five innings. And he reminded everybody that Paul Derringer and Bucky Walters started 60 games in 1939 or 40 and finished 50-some. That's pretty good.