

BLUE JAY FEATURE

Dave McKay, baseball player



DAVE MCKAY

By COLIN GIBSON
Herald Sports Editor

There is a popular misconception currently making the rounds in the sports sections of the Toronto media, in fact, the National media and it concerns Dave McKay, Blue Jays third baseman.

Through no fault of his own, McKay has been tagged with the "Designated Canadian" label. Make no mistake, McKay is proud of the fact that he is a Canadian, but he would much rather make his mark in the major leagues as a ballplayer, than as a figurehead displayed to assuage the National psyche.

His record for itself and there is no doubt in the minds of knowledgeable baseball people, that with his ability, regardless of whether he had been a Tartar from Outer Mongolia, he was bound to be picked up when unprotected in the expansion draft.

McKay is 27 years old, and jealously guards the two loves of his life, his family and baseball. Dave and his wife, Lena, have a three-year-old son, Cody and while the family part only came about recently, the baseball lure has been with him for 10 years.

The Jays third basemen grew up in Vancouver, British Columbia and throughout his youth, stuck mainly to soccer, rugby and basketball. He didn't play hockey, simply because his pals were into other sports and therefore the game didn't interest him.

He freely admitted, however, that given a second go-round, he would more than likely look into the game of hockey more seriously.

Although he went through the Babe Ruth and Connie Mack baseball leagues in Bri-

lsh Columbia, McKay's real initiation into the game of baseball didn't come about until he was offered a baseball scholarship to Columbia Insin Junior College in Pasco Washington.

McKay soon discovered that his Canadian baseball career had left him sadly lacking in various capacities.

While he was wont to put the knock on his formative years baseball coaches, he found a vast difference in the approach to the game, in Canada and the United States.

He felt that his Canadian coaches had no concept of the development of players. Dave eased this criticism by noting however, "They had nothing to relate to, in terms of the future of their players, so it was mainly a recreational activity."

McKay felt that the Canadian coaches were particularly lax in the knowledge of the treatment of pitchers and would simply, "Go with their best for as long and as often as they could." He felt that this approach has ruined many a young Canadian pitcher.

For the next eight years, McKay toiled in the minors, learning the finer points of the game and it is in this respect that he questions the "Designated Canadian" rule.

"Over the last 10 years," he pointed out, "I've spent, at the most, four months of the year in Canada. The rest of the time, because of baseball, I've been down South."

It was in 1975 that McKay got his chance in the majors, when his parent organization, the Minnesota Twins, elevated him because of an injury to their regular third baseman.

It proved to be quite a debut, as McKay homered in his first

official at bat, only the 43rd player in the history of the majors to pull off such a feat.

This proved to be the highlight of his baseball career, prior to being drafted by the Blue Jays.

He won a starting spot with the Twins in the spring of last year, but then an ankle injury and other assorted problems, led to a less than satisfying year.

The Twins left him unprotected in the expansion draft, he was subsequently picked up by the Blue Jays, but in truth, McKay was glad to be rid of the Minnesota organization.

"I was very happy when I was left unprotected," commented McKay. "I wanted to leave the Twins and believe me, I wasn't the only one. I believe every Twin, including Rod Carew wanted out."

Dave cited lack of communication between the players and management as the main reason for his discontent with the Twins organization.

Although he has got off to a slow start with the Jays, McKay's only wish is to be able to help the team. Although his hitting has been off, he has more than made up for this shortcoming by some brilliant fielding.

He is realistic about his baseball career, knowing that he will probably never rise to the star status, but as long as he can make a contribution to his team, he will continue playing.

At the relatively young age of 27, McKay still has a good many years ahead of him, he would like to stay in the game for another 10 years, in some capacity, then through his baseball contacts, embark on a second career.

Although he didn't complete

his college degree, McKay stresses the importance of education. "I would advise any young person to attend University," he stated "You should try and work baseball into your schooling. It might be rough, at times, but if you want anything bad enough, it just takes hard work to achieve your goals."

He also advised young ballplayers that you have to be willing to listen and learn, especially the finer points of the game. This can only come about with practice, practice and more practice.

Similarly, although it might be difficult at first, a ballplayer has to be willing to

travel. "You go where you have to go to learn the game," McKay observed.

It's difficult to tell how far Dave McKay will go along the major league baseball route but one thing is certain, he will take things in stride and strive even harder to overcome whatever pitfalls may appear in his

path. He has already proven that he is capable of this. No, Dave McKay is not the Jays "Designated Canadian" he might not even survive the summer as the Jays regular third baseman. One thing is certain, however, in every sense of the word, he is a professional.

HERALD sports

COLIN GIBSON, SPORTS EDITOR



I'm forever blowing bubbles. Blue Jay outfielder, Gary Woods, isn't much interested in the sports section as he gets some mileage out of his chewing gum. Dave McKay and Alvis Woods check the stats and Woods

has a right to glow. At press time, his recent torrid hitting streak, moved him into third place in the American League batting race.

Love affair renewed

Sports
Comment



By COLIN GIBSON
Herald Sports Editor

.....I renewed an old love affair last week, one that I thought had gone the way of most youthful infatuations; subsequently filed in the back of one's mind only to be retrieved when stirring memories.

The bygone flame that I am referring to is baseball. Ladies and girls softball is about ready to commence in Halton Hills, as is men's fastball, both the Intercity and Industrial variety. Minor baseball teams will begin their summer campaign shortly and so last week I decided to journey to Toronto and investigate the latest Canadian sports phenomenon - the Toronto Blue Jays.

On arriving to the "Big Crab Apple" I reflected on my first experiences with the game of baseball.

My interest in the game was aroused, not only by the glossy American publications on the newstands that featured the wholesomeness of the "Great American Pastime" but by two characters who entertained me on my youthful Saturday afternoon.

I'm referring to Dizzy Dean and Pee Wee Reese, who were the broadcasters for NBC's Game of the Week, that was picked up by CBC television every Saturday many, many years ago.

At the time, my family was living in Cochrane, in Northern Ontario and the only television channel that was available, was CBC through television station CFCL in Timmins, roughly 60 miles away.

Today, with the advent of Cable T.V., one can almost spin the dial (play-on, television roulette) and pick up some channel at any hour of the day, or night. The majority of the major networks regurgitate sports programs - or in some cases, what passes as sports programs - as if the athletic Armageddon was fast approaching and sports over-kill is becoming a reality.

In the early 1960's in Northern Ontario, the weekly sports fare was limited to Saturday afternoon baseball, Saturday night hockey (brought to you by Imperial Oil, with fatherly Murray Westgate urging you "Look to Imperial for the best") and for the grunt and groan fanatics, late night Saturday wrestling. In those days, the hockey game didn't come on until nine o'clock, time only for a period-and-a-half of play.

There were occasional sports specials, but for the most part, fans up North were on a strict sporting diet.

I think this is what made those Saturday afternoon baseball games so special. Dizzy Dean would announce the games, from somewhere under a 10 or 20 gallon hat and you would know the game was really underway when he would utter his first "Podnar."

Dean and Reese brought something to the game of baseball that is somehow sadly lacking in the majority of today's broadcasting crews. Perhaps it was character and love of the game. Dizzy might play the buffoon, and Reese might play the straight man to some of Dean's put-ons but they never upstaged the game at hand and it was obvious that they had a deep love and respect for baseball.

In the early 1960's, the New York Yankees were everybody's favorite team and admittedly, I was no exception. Unabashedly, I loved the Yanks. You couldn't pick up a comic book, but there was Mickey Mantle on the back cover, the epitome of the All-American boy.

Jim Bouton's revelations notwithstanding, in his book, Ball Four, Mantle's triumphs and tragedy's were etched into the minds of a generation of youngsters. He was, and still is, to many people, what a baseball player - or perhaps an athlete - was all about.

I remember cheering Mickey and getting absolutely apoplectic when Roger Maris lofted one over the fence. "Lucky shot," I would mutter, "How much are you paying the pitcher?" I would demand as Maris' image circled the bases.

When Mantle and Maris were jointly chasing Babe Ruth's single season home run record, I decided to get into the act. I decided, however, in a fit of pique, when Maris started to pull ahead of Mantle in the home run Derby, that I would top them all - to save face for my hero - by wiping out Ruth's all-time home run record of 714 in a single season.

Through sandlot, pickup, school yard and league games; anywhere some kind of baseball (or softball) game was going on, I kept track of my home runs.

By May I had hit 200. By June, 475, by July, I had passed the 600 home run mark. The momentous month was August, when I passed the old "Sultan of Swat."

I recall circling the bases, jumping for joy when number 715 got lost in the long grass and I knew my quest was over. My enthusiasm wasn't dampened in the least when the erstwhile fireballing pitcher, (who had served up the last historic offering) informed me that he had to go home because it was time for his nap. Three-year-olds, I discovered, find historic occasions rather boring - especially when they're tired.

My biggest thrill as a youngster came about as a result of baseball and the New York Yankees.

I remember I had just finished reading a book entitled *Ball Boy for the Indians* and as it was early in the year, I decided to write to the Yankees and offer myself for that prestigious position with my heroes.

I sent the letter to Ralph Houk, the then Manager of the Yanks (now with the Detroit Tigers) and addressed it to Yankee Stadium, somewhere in New York. I didn't really expect a reply, but several weeks later, my mother came into my room with an envelope addressed to me from the New York Yankees.

The letter was datelined Fort Lauderdale Florida, the Yankees spring training site and it was from Ralph Houk. He explained to me as gently as he could, that the Yankee hat boys were recruited locally and that therefore there wasn't much chance I would get the job.

In a sense, I suppose I had expected as much, but what I didn't expect was the large manila envelope that arrived two days later. Houk had forwarded to me, an autographed picture of the Yankees, along with personal biographies on all the players, including their off-season addresses (in case I wanted to correspond with them) several souvenirs and a season schedule.

Needless to say, my Yankee ardour increased by leaps and bounds.

Baseball died out in Northern Ontario and aside from the odd pickup game, my energies were channelled into softball. The love affair that had blossomed so early, began to wither on the vine (as so often happens) from lack of attention.

I thought I had gotten over my puppy love until I came into contact with the Toronto Blue Jay organization. The stirrings began again, however, almost as soon as I entered the clubhouse and was assailed by the sights, sounds, smells and language that are part and parcel of the game of baseball.

The youthful irreverence of the locker room, the cockiness, so obvious, yet so essential for a young team, surrounded the Blue Jays. The players and other Blue Jay personnel that I spoke to were, to a man, pleasant, cooperative and above all, enthusiastic.

The Jays will take their knocks, both on the field and from the media but there is something about them that suggests they will rise above the tumult. Call it vitality, call it aggressiveness, call it youth, if you want. Whatever, the Toronto Blue Jays have it and they've also attracted another supporter.

New York is too far away anyway.



Otto Velez (left) and Pedro Garcia find something to smile about as the weather closed in on Exhibition Stadium last week. Velez has been a standout for the Blue Jays. The ex-New York Yankee, who was captured by the Blue Jays in the expansion draft, was

voted the American League's Player of the Month for the month of April. As proof of Velez' value to the Jays, he finished ahead of established major league stars, Joe Rudi of California and Chicago slugger, Richie Zisk, in the MVP balloting.



Tony Oliva, the sweet singing Minnesota Twins star, whose career has been plagued by injuries. When he was healthy, Oliva was the premier hitter in the American League but injuries have shunted him to the designated hitter role.

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