

Vienna's Former Major Leaguers

Sports fans in and around Vienna don't have to give ground to anyone in these parts when it comes to having had major league baseball players live in their midst.

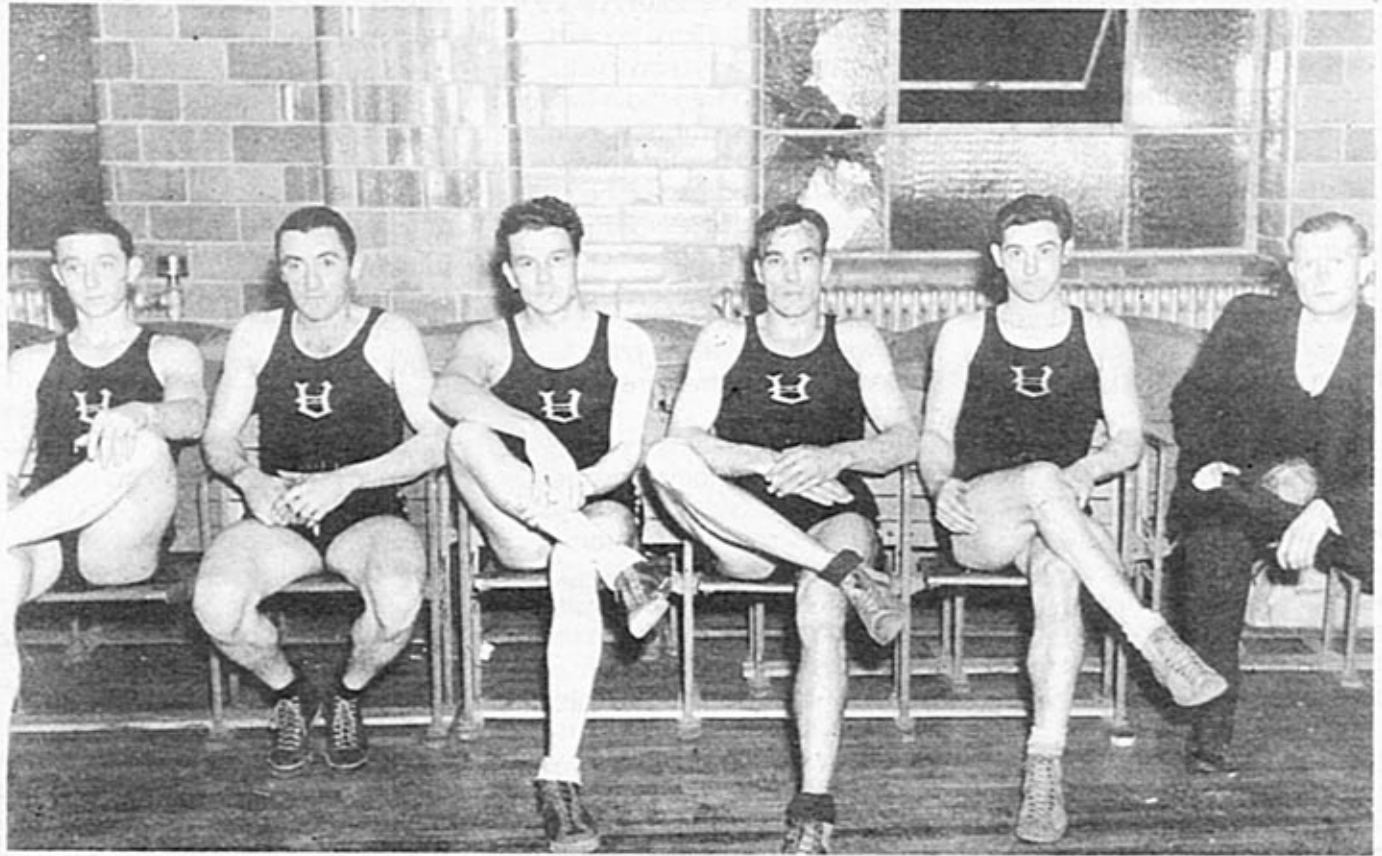
'Rollie' Hemsley

For a period of 18 years, Ralston B. 'Rollie' Hemsley, played with some of the greatest names in the game. Plying his trade as catcher, he was credited by some as being instrumental in developing Bob Feller into one of the best pitchers of that era. Feller went on to win 17, 24 and 27 games respectively in the three years Hemsley caught for the Cleveland Indians in 1938, 39 and 40.

"I can't recall that I did anything special, except to force him to throw to the strike zone," Rollie was once quoted as modestly saying. "Also, I told him that he couldn't throw the ball through me, that I'd catch it."

He caught Feller's 1940 opening day no-hitter and drove in the game's only run with a triple.

But there was a dark side, too. Rollie gained the reputation of hoisting the glass a few times too many, and in the process, earned



Rollie Hemsley and Hershell Martin played on Vienna's town basketball team in the off season in the 1930's. From left to right, the ballplayers in this picture are Henry Duffin, Jeff Duffin, Alfred Bullock, Hershell Martin, Rollie Hemsley and Tom Coffee. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Maries County.

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the nickname of "Rollicking Rollie." Then too, there was a bitter feud that developed between him and legendary player-turned-manager Roger Hornsby shortly after the St. Louis Browns manager made a special trade with Pittsburgh to obtain the catcher.

"It was an odd affinity Hornsby held for Hemsley, who loved to drink as much as Hack and Malone," Clifton Blue Parker has written in his new book, *Fouled Away: The Baseball Tragedy of Hack Wilson*. "In fact, those three began hanging out together, venturing out to the speakeasies.

"In late June, they all three ran afoul of Hornsby. Hack and Malone missed curfew; Hemsley made it back to his room before midnight, though stone-drunk."

Despite these rollicking ways, Rollie enjoyed his best year in the majors with the Browns in 1934, when he hit at a .309 clip.

It was during this stint at St. Louis that Hemsley brought his wife Mildred and daughter Joan to Maries County in 1936. He purchased the Louis F. Krone farm and built a nice home there on Highway 42 a few miles west of Vienna. The Hemsleys resided there for some fifteen years.

Rollie broke into the major leagues with Pittsburgh in 1928 and went on to become a

well-traveled professional. The Pirates traded him to the Cubs in '31. He donned a Cincinnati Reds uniform in '33 and went to the St. Louis Browns the following year. The Cleveland Indians traded three players to get him in '38. Rollie wound up with the New York Yankees in '42 after briefly returning to Cleveland, was sent down to the minors in '45 and ended his major league playing career with the Philadelphia Phillies in '46 and '47. He played in 1593 games, including 3 World Series games, and was a .262 lifetime hitter in the majors with 31 home runs and 555 runs batted in.

Rollie went on to manage several minor league baseball teams and to become a coach for the Washington Senators and Philadelphia Athletics. He whipped his drinking habit with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous, and was named TSN Minor League Manager of the Year in 1950 and 1963.

Rollie was said to have never missed attending the All-Star games throughout the years. He was seen at many other baseball gatherings as well.

"Rollie Hemsley, a man who loved baseball and admitted he learned too late how much he loved it, tried almost to the end to get back in it," wrote St. Louis

Globe-Democrat sports columnist Bob Burns upon the former major leaguer's death in 1972 in Washington, D. C., at the age of 65.

Herschel Martin

Though a less flamboyant figure, Hershel enjoyed his own brand of fame in major league baseball. More of a power hitter than Hemsley, Martin used back muscles he developed by swinging a sledge in the oil fields in Oklahoma to compile a .408 lifetime slugging average in playing for the Phillies and Yankees. In 607 games, "Hersh" ripped 135 doubles, 29 triples and 28 homers.

The crafty, switchhitting outfielder scored 102 runs as a Phillies rookie in 1937. His best year was in 1944 for the Yankees when he batted .302. He played for Philadelphia from 1937-40 and for the Yankees from 1944-45. His hitting records show him driving in 215 runs and averaging .285 throughout his playing career.

Herschel's greatest impact in the big leagues came as a New York Mets scout from 1961 to 1979, a period of time when the fledgling team grew from the majors' worst team to one of its best.

He died in 1980 at the age of 71 and was a Vienna-area resident for a period of time.



Murphy's Store at Frank's. Originally called Frank's Switch, the community derived its name from Frisco operator Frank Stanzel, who had to throw a train track switch there. Courtesy of John F. Bradbury.

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