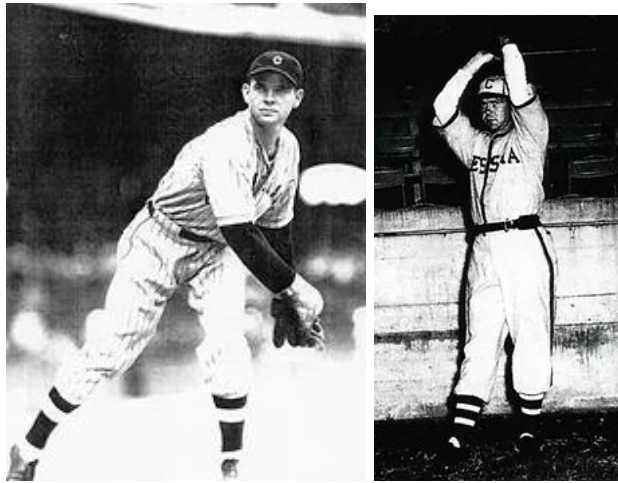


Ralph Winegarner

1909 - 1988



Ralph Winegarner was born on October 29, 1909, in Benton, Kansas, the youngest of six children born to Dennis Lee Winegarner and Anna Fenton McBride Winegarner. The family made their home at 305 South Wichita in Benton.

After his first year at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas on a sports scholarship, Ralph decided that he did not wish to become a preacher or a teacher and dropped out.

In 1928, he went to work for Travel Air, a company formed by Walter Beech, Lloyd Stearman, and Clyde Cessna in 1925. In 1932 the company became Beech Aircraft Corp. and was later sold to Raytheon in 1980.

While working for Travel Air, Winegarner spent the summer playing baseball on the company team. It was during a game played in Texas that he was spotted by a scout and offered a professional contract.

While growing up, folks who saw him play said that Ralph was the best baseball player they had ever seen, good enough to play in the majors. He was honored by the compliments but had a difficult time believing that his talents were that special. He was known by future teammates as "Snakes" because "wherever he attempted things, he would go at it like killing snakes."

He could do about anything on a baseball field except go behind the plate. Besides pitching, he played first and third base and the outfield. In 1931 he played shortstop for the New Orleans Pelicans. He was a great pinch-hitter; with the Indians in 1935, he went 11 for 29 (.379) as a pinch-hitter.

Throughout his baseball career, Ralph continued to work for Travel Air / Beech during the winters, as well as refereeing basketball games.

On the morning of October 14, 1931, Ralph married Lucille Marnane in Garden Plains, Kansas. That same afternoon, he played in a baseball game at Lawrence Stadium in Wichita.

Ralph loved the game, giving it all he had. His wife later remembered the certain gleam in his eyes every time he stepped on the field. He considered himself to be the luckiest man in the world to be doing what he loved to do.

Although Winegarner had given up smoking in his later years, the habit had damaged his lungs, developing into emphysema. He died on April 14, 1988 at the age of 56. His wife, Lucille, remembered that he was never sick with the flu or even a cold, but the cigarettes took their toll.

Winegarner had fond memories of playing against Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmy Fox and Charlie Gehringer in the early 1930s. He later went up against Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams. He thought Sandy Koufax was one of the best pitchers that ever played. While coaching the Browns, he enjoyed observing later stars like Mickey Mantle. One of his most memorable events was the day he beat "Lefty" Bob Grove at Cleveland, Ohio.