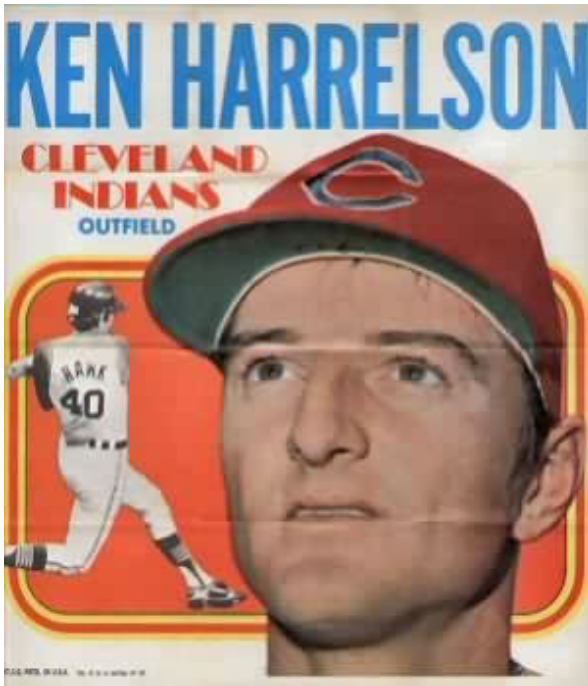


Cleveland Sports Vault: Hawk Harrelson Joins the Indians

Written by {ga=googleph2}

Thursday, June 27 2013 1:00 PM - Last Updated Thursday, June 27 2013 9:41 AM



I had my preconceived notions about Ken Harrelson. Even though I was a very young kid when he played for the Indians, there's plenty of information out there today on the flamboyant ballplayer from the 1960s.

“Hawk”, as he is known (even to himself, in the third person), has freely admitted he is not a modest man. He allows he is egocentric, even. Even today, as the current television voice of the Chicago White Sox, he's a polarizing figure. Even among White Sox fans.

Followers of the struggling Cleveland Indians of the 1960s still carried fresh memories of the strong teams of the previous decade. While much of the 1950s were owned by the New York Yankees, the Tribe was very good as well.

The 60s were when Municipal Stadium began to depreciate as a desirable venue for baseball

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(although for Cleveland football fans, it was terrific all the way until its 1990s demise). It was more than twice the size it needed to be, and the windswept concrete and steel remained cold and damp for much of the season.

Furthermore, the Indians franchise was no longer contending for a pennant; the dozens of crazy Frank Lane trades around the beginning of the decade had shuffled the roster into a mess. Fans stayed away, and the team's financial position was precarious enough to attract suitors - other cities, such as New



Orleans and Seattle, who longed for a big league baseball team of their own.

By the late 60s, Gabe Paul, a lifetime baseball executive, was running the operations of the Indians. He knew northeast Ohio would explode with support if handed a winner. He called Cleveland "a sleeping giant." Over the years, scribes have treated the comment with an odd admiration, as if he were the only person who saw this. He was right, of course, and it was proved to be true in the 1990s- but all Cleveland fans intuitively knew this. It was obvious. We were always all about emotional support. We complained, we fumed, but we always cared.

By 1969, "Pope" Paul wanted to make a splash. The team, he felt, needed a marquee name. A player with star power, and a personality to match. He learned that Ken Harrelson of the Boston Red Sox was on the trading block.

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Harrelson was always a flashy personality, going back to his childhood in Savannah, Georgia. He was drafted by Charlie Finley's Kansas City Athletics in 1963, and picked up the nickname "Hawk" in the minors. (Cleveland actually had also tried to sign him out of high school, as a pitcher.) He felt the nickname suited his prominent nose, but also his personality. At a very early age, Hawk was interested in marketing his persona, for publicity and possible financial gain. He met the PA announcers in minor league ball parks and asked them to announce him as "Hawk Harrelson."

He wasn't fiery, like so many outspoken ball players had been over the years. He was extravagant. Showy.

He loved clothes. His was the "mod" style.

Flashy, fashionable. Opposite of hippie. Mod. In my opinion, it was the 60s' mods who became the 70s' disco generation.

Back in the early 60s, many postwar British youth chose to separate themselves between the mods and the rockers. Rockers were masculine, heavy drinkers, whereas mods were stylish, and favored caffeine and amphetamines (check out the movie Quadrophenia, by The Who). By the late 60s, the kids were growing up. At least in the U.S., "mod" became mostly a reference to the Nehru jacket, tight pants look. My impression is that the roughest edge of the rockers started the punk movement.

Hawk borrowed money from Finley- lots of it. He spent much of it on clothes, perhaps partially to compensate for growing up without much money, as the only child of a single mother. To receive payments on the debt, Finley arranged to withhold a certain percentage of the ballplayer's salary from his paychecks. Hawk also claimed to be capable of augmenting income with some gambling on the side- most likely playing billiards. In fact, among that, cards, football, baseball, basketball, golf, and other activities, he said baseball wasn't what he was best at. It was third, behind basketball and football.

In 1966, Hawk's new manager in Kansas City was Alvin Dark. The two understood each other, and got along great. Hawk was traded to the Washington Senators later that season, only to be reacquired by the A's in 1967. The A's' players were disenchanted with the unpredictable

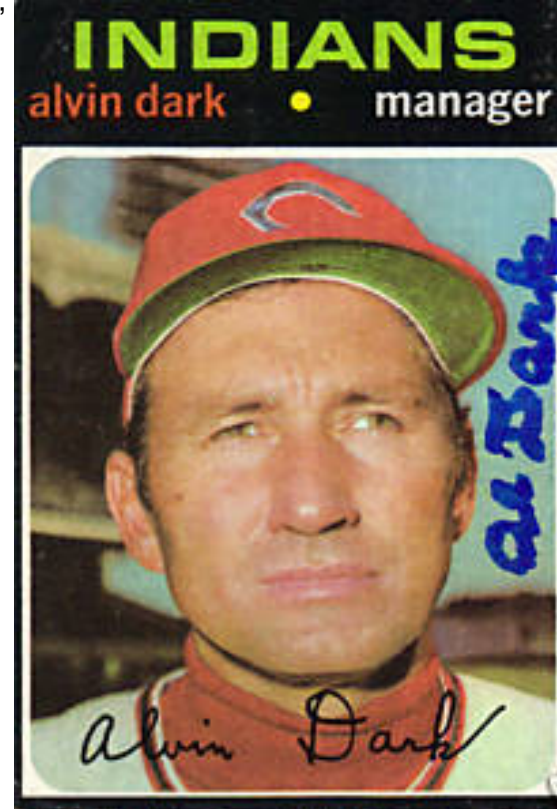
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Finley, who exacerbated the situation with his eventual firing of Dark.

In retrospect, it seemed inevitable: when Dark was let go, Hawk Harrelson lashed out. The media reported that he stated Finley was a “menace to baseball.”



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<http://twitter.com/googleph2> #thanks

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SI VAULT



There was none of that new-boys-in-town, go-slow routine. The Hawk came to Cleveland waving a new hand signal he has adopted (youth's



symbol for peace); he brought along his business deals with associates, and his image as a blithe, if shaggy, spirit to spread all around.



He outfitted his new pad (the Hawk picked this jazzy bedroom suite), did not get a hair cut but did impose his monogrammed clothes to show



off at the stadium—and finally seizes (below) to face a new life an



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Zoom In



Jul 14, 1969



Zoom In