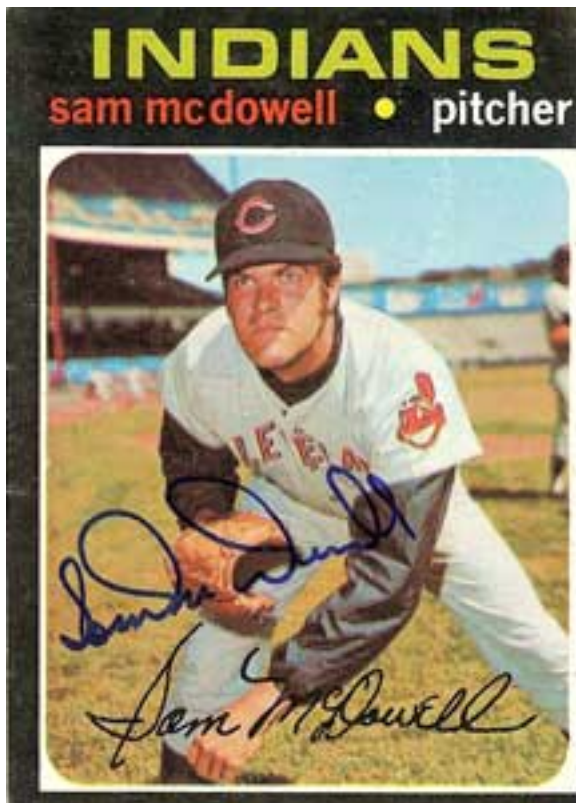


Blast From The Past: "Sudden Sam" McDowell

Written by {ga=googleph2}

Wednesday, July 20 2011 4:00 AM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 05 2012 11:09 AM



When I am grilling in the backyard, my wife may ask how long it will be until the meat is ready. I'll hold my cigar in one hand, measure the remaining length with the index finger and thumb of my other hand, and say, "This long." She thinks I am hilarious (note: sarcasm alert). Of course, my wife is also familiar with one of my favorite admonitions from the television show, Cheers. Again, while holding the index finger and thumb a couple of inches apart: "Hey, don't ever do this to a guy, in public!"

That rule to live by came from Cheers bartender Sam Malone. In the show, "Mayday Malone" was a retired major league pitcher whose career was hampered by his alcoholism. Sam Malone's past struggle with binge drinking was loosely based on the playing career of a Cleveland Indians star from the 1960s, Sam McDowell.

Star pitcher. Career cut short. Could have been a Hall-of-Famer if it hadn't been for the drinking. That's what one commonly hears about Sam McDowell. But was the drinking the cause of his troubles, or perhaps one result of inner turmoil?

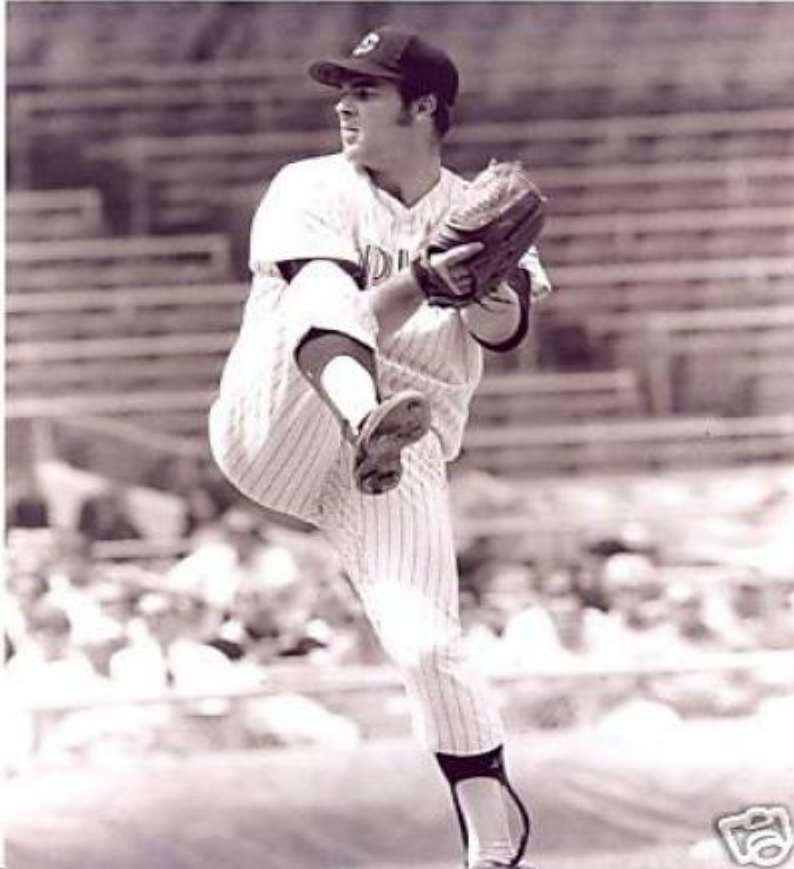
Sudden Sam was a left-hander signed by the Tribe out of high school, with a six-figure bonus. This was a huge amount of money for 1960. He was rushed to the majors, and started a game

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in 1961 (the year Cleveland writer Bob Dolgan gave him his immortal nickname). He had control problems, walking almost seven batters per nine innings. He threw uncommonly hard- he once broke three ribs while trying to put a little extra on a pitch. He bounced between the big league club and the minors for a couple years, and began to be more consistent by 1964.



It was said that Sam McDowell was able to throw a baseball at 108 miles per hour. Writers speculated that he was almost as fast as Bob Feller, and Sandy Koufax in his youth. There was some unchallenged sentiment that he was faster than the legendary Walter Johnson.

McDowell began a period of domination in the American League in 1965. His ERA was an AL-leading 2.18. He struck out 325 batters, which was fourth-best in history at the time. His 10.71 strikeouts per nine innings that year - occurring during an era when hitters viewed low strikeout totals as a source of pride - was a then-MLB record, lasting until Dwight Gooden's unbelievable 1984 season.

From 1965 through 1971, Sudden Sam was an All Star six times.

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In 1966, he led the league in shutouts and in strikeouts, despite an arm injury during the season. He threw back-to-back one-hitters and was named "Pitcher of the Year" by The Sporting News.

In 1967, he finished second in strikeouts to Boston's Jim Lonborg.

In 1968 and 1969, he again led the league in strikeouts.

In 1970, he won 20 games and was again named "Pitcher of the Year".

Cleveland Indians fans voted Sam McDowell the Cleveland Indians Player of the Decade.

In 1971, Sam McDowell's record dropped to 13-17. Although his ERA was 3.40 (not bad even for that era), his act had worn thin with the Indians. Prior to the 1972 season, he was traded to the San Francisco Giants for Gaylord Perry and Frank Duffy. Duffy did hit for average during some of his six years with the Tribe, but his true worth was as a top defensive shortstop.

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