



Kittle, Lynn put heads together, only All-Star grand-slammer the end result

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A couple of homeboys put their heads together on a memorable July night on the South Side in 1983.

The end result was the only grand-slam homer in All-Star Game history, fittingly at old Comiskey Park on the 50th anniversary of the first Mid-Summer Classic in the same ballpark.

The ad-libbed scouting report Ron Kittle, the pride of Gary, Ind., gave in the dugout about lefty Atlee Hammaker to Chicago native Fred Lynn is a little-known nugget of history that is being brought to light on the 30th anniversary of Lynn's bases-loaded blast.



Robin Yount (from left), Manny Trillo and Rod Carew greet Fred Lynn at home plate after he slugged his grand-slam homer.

Interestingly, Lynn came back to throw out the first pitch 20 years later when the All-Star Game returned to Chicago, this time to U.S. Cellular Field. But on another anniversary date in 2013, none of the three games, including the inaugural 1933 gala that featured Babe Ruth's memorable homer, is being commemorated in town.

Giants lefty Hammaker was already on the ropes when Lynn came to bat in the third inning on July 6, 1983. Hammaker already had allowed a leadoff homer to left by Jim Rice. The American League line was moving and two more runs had scored. Manny Trillo and Rod Carew were on third and second, respectively. Hammaker then intentionally walked Robin Yount to load the bases for Lynn.

Getting the 'book' on Hammaker

Interleague play was still 14 years into the future. Angels outfielder Lynn wasn't too familiar with Hammaker, other than the occasional spring-training appearance. But White Sox rookie Kittle, who had played against Hammaker in the minors, was eager to help.

“He asked anybody, ‘Know who this guy was?’” Kittle recalled. “I told him breaking balls to left-handers. He was in the minor-leagues against us. I faced him two years in a row.”

Said Lynn: “You didn’t see these guys. You ask what’s he’s got. Running fastball, good sink, pretty good breaking ball.”

But as Hammaker threw his four balls to Yount, Lynn had to grit his teeth. He balanced his emotions of facing the bases drunk vs. the semi-insult of a man being passed to get to him.

“There aren’t too many times when somebody walks the guy in front of me, to get to me,” said Lynn. “It happened once (while he played for Southern Cal) in the College World Series against the University of Texas. Same scenario, first open, guy on second. Bring in a lefty. I hit a three-run homer, we knock them out of the series and we go on to win the championship.

“It’s hard to control your emotions, because you’re pissed off. I understand the strategy because Robin Yount was reigning MVP, so you walk him to load the bases. Still what am I, chopped liver? It gets my full attention. I get fully focused. The crowd is no longer there. It’s just me and Atlee.

“He actually threw two good breaking balls, and I missed them both early in the count. Then I ran the count to 2-2. This is the pitch he’s got to make because he doesn’t want to go 3-2. He’s got to go to the breaking ball, because it’s his best pitch. I was looking for it. Had he threw his fastball, he probably would have struck me out. But he threw his breaking ball again and I hit it out.”

Breaking the NL’s win streak

The only way Lynn could have enjoyed the homer any more was if it was a pennant-clincher. The pride as he rounded the bases in triumph, as the AL grabbed a 9-1 lead, was shared by everyone in his dugout.

The NL had beaten the AL 11 in a row and 19 of the past 20 All-Star Games. League identification was still strong in the young free-agency era with the NL and AL also run by separate presidents and officiated by different umpiring crews.

“We had a pretty good group of American Leaguers who had played in numerous All-Star Games,” Lynn said. “They (NL) put a pretty big hurt on us as a league. That was in the back of our minds.

“I knew we couldn’t blow this lead. We squandered some leads against the NL. It was a big deal. We finally broke the string. The AL dominated the NL from that point.”

Lynn got another bit of great news when he made his circuit and returned to the AL dugout.

“Bob Fishel was in the dugout from Major League Baseball, this little guy in a suit from New York,” he said. “He said it’s the first grand slam ever hit (in All-Star history). I’m incredulous. After that, you’re your career is over, you (realize) might go three, four years before there’s even a bases-loaded situation. Today, if that happens, you’re facing somebody’s closer.

“The best chance I thought it would happen again would have been in Colorado (in 1998). You don’t have to hit them very well in Colorado. Mark McGwire is up, he’s a (Southern Cal) Trojan just like me. I thought, this would be cool, have two Trojans hit grand slams. And he popped up. Bases loaded doesn’t happen that often. And I never had any as a Red Sox. I had eight or nine in my career. Just a freak of nature kind of thing.”

Lynn also was proud he beat the Babe when the tape measure was concerned.

“Actually, I hit it in almost the same spot,” he said. “But mine was further. He had me by 50 pounds.”

The grand-slammer was the cherry on the sundae for both Lynn and Kittle, reveling in the experience of the anniversary game in Chicago.

Lynn’s memorable summers in Chicago

The All-Star Game had never gotten old for Lynn, who had been a staple in the contest since winning both AL Rookie of the Year and MVP with the Red Sox in 1975. And this one was special.



Fred Lynn connects on his grand slam off Atlee Hamaker.

Although he had grown up in southern California, his roots were firmly in Chicago. Much of his family still lived on the North Side. Lynn still has fond memories of spending summers in Chicago, making the short trip to Wrigley Field and at age 9 in 1961 watching George Altman’s own dream All-Star season unfold (see accompanying story). Eight years later, Lynn also avidly watched from the right-field bleachers the spectacle of the Pirates’ Roberto Clemente unleashing one of his laser throws during visitors’ batting practice.

“It was the 50th, and Babe Ruth played in the first one and hit a home run there,” Lynn said. “It had a lot of significance to me because it was my home town.

“Fifty years was not that long ago when you think of it when I was playing. Babe Ruth was on this field. I was fortunate to play in the era when you played in the same stadiums as some of those great players. The ghost of those players past were swarming around in the stadium.”

Lynn was charged up to play in old Comiskey whenever the Red Sox and Angels came through town.

“You think of Bill Veeck and the exploding scoreboard and midgets and balls that come up out of the ground,” he said. “All those things, belly dancers in center field, (outfield) showers. I loved doing well there so they couldn’t do all that stuff (Nancy Faust organ-playing of ‘Na na na, hey hey, good-bye’). I was there right after Disco Demolition Night. I saw it first-hand. I wish I had documented everything I saw in my patch of dirt. It was mud.”

He didn’t mention spotting what Sox “sodfather” Roger Bossard would soon see: marijuana plants, apparently seeded by the Disco Demolition crowd, growing in nine places on the field.

“It wouldn’t have surprised me,” said Lynn.

Pleasing the home folks

The thrill of performing before family and friends was a motivation to both Lynn and Kittle.

“All my cousins were around uncle, my dad’s brother six kids,” said Lynn. “Some of them begrudgingly went to Sox Park, they’re North Siders.”

“I was probably more happy for my family coming to see me than for myself,” said Kittle, strangely the only White Sox All-Star on a team that featured Carlton Fisk, Greg Luzinski and Harold Baines. He would go on to win AL Rookie of the Year honors for his 35-homer season that included rooftop shots.

“I was like the media darling,” Kittle said. “I tried to do everything (interview) possible. That probably took more of a toll on me because I tried to accommodate everybody. “5 a.m. (interview), doing Johnny Morris, Jeannie Morris (segments).”

Kittle the starry-eyed kid watching the big boys play now was their teammate and opponent on July 6, 1983.

“I was a fan of those guys,” he said. “I watched those guys play. It couldn’t been a bigger thrill. I got a couple of my game bats autographed by all the players and all the Hall of Famers. I was a kid in a candy store. I didn’t even care if I played or not.

“I was in left field, Rickey Henderson was in right. Rickey said I can’t play right field, I’m left-handed. So I went to right field. I’m out there, it was all fun. The fan ovation I got was overwhelming.”

Kittle collected an infield single, a big comedown from his Ruth-ian shots of '83 at Comiskey. Then it was time for country hardball with Cubs closer Lee Arthur Smith.

“My second time up, I batted against Lee,” he said. “He threw the ball like 110 mph. I couldn’t hit 95, let alone 110. We both had a smile on our faces. We’re still friends, and I talked to him two weeks ago at an alumni event. He said, ‘Kitty, I gave you the best I ever threw and you just missed it.’”

Twenty years later at U.S. Cellular Field, Lynn discovered the Hall of Fame somehow had forgotten to bring back his grand-slam bat from '83. He was then tabbed to throw out the first pitch.

“One of my cousins gave me a Clincher (softball),” Lynn said. “He said, throw this out on the first pitch and everyone in Chicago will love it. I played 16-inch softball in the summers in Chicago. I had it with me, but I said, nah, Major League Baseball will not like that.”

Ah, but at least half of MLB sure liked Lynn’s sweet swing, helped by “scout” Ron Kittle, as the momentum changer on a memorable night in the famed “Winning Ugly” season.



Fred Lynn (from left) helped form a powerful Angels lineup with Don Baylor, Reggie Jackson and Rod Carew.