



Proceeds from Pierce's Chicago Cancer Charities have made a difference over 4 decades

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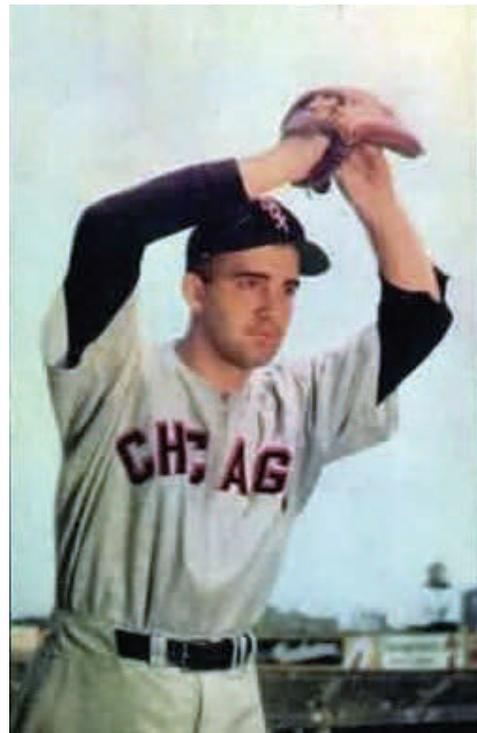
Whenever a sports “name” gets seriously involved in a philanthropic venture, he might wonder whether his hard work ends up with good results 10 or 20 years later.

In the case of Billy Pierce, the facts prove that his time helping run Chicago Baseball Cancer Charities hasn't gone for naught over more than four decades. The money he has raised for cancer treatment and research at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago has made a dent in what was frequently a death sentence for afflicted persons when he started out.

“I talked to different doctors about (the success or cure rate),” said former White Sox ace Pierce, hale and healthy at 86. “When I began, it was an 85 percent chance against curing leukemia with kids. Now it's an 85 percent success rate. On all cancers, they are curing many more people. But there seems to be more (kinds of) cancer turning up. So many different types of cancers, and they need different treatment.

“I had melanoma on my eye. You can name almost every part of the body, and there are some cancer forms. The only way to cure them is to get it early. That's better than before -- nobody knew it until it was almost too late.”

Dr. David Fletcher, president of the Chicago Baseball Museum, backs up Pierce's analysis that every dollar raised for cancer research as made a difference over the decades.



Billy Pierce during his Sox prime in the mid-1950s.

“What you bring is the fact these charities have local dollars to be spent on Chicago’s top research hospitals, in fighting all forms of cancer, and make considerable headway in their prevention, cure and treatment,” Fletcher said.

“Not only do people have better outcomes, but the awareness it’s brought has helped. You need (financing for) trials. The great Cubs president, William Veeck, Sr. (who died suddenly of leukemia at 56 in Oct. 1933) would have survived today. It’s had significant impact.”

Golf outing July 8 at Twin Orchard

Chicago Baseball Cancer Charities stages an annual golf outing and dinner, chaired by Pierce. The latest event is planned for July 8 at Twin Orchard Country Club in Long Grove. Fee is \$700 per person, or \$2,800 for a foursome. Dinner without golf is \$100 per person.

“Greatest food you’ll ever eat,” said Pierce.

The event has moved around over the decades, from Itasca to Highland Park to Midlothian, to Twin Orchard, then south to Olympia Fields, then finally back to Twin Orchard.

“We made \$500 with our first event,” Pierce said. Record fund-raising total was \$400,000. Now Pierce said a typical amount is \$300,000. The proceeds are divided between Northwestern, which gets a little more than half, and Children’s Memorial.

The event began as the Hutch Fund, headed by former minor leaguer Marv Samuel, in 1970. The name came from Fred Hutchinson, longtime big-league manager who died of cancer in 1964.

“We sent it (proceeds) through intermediaries to Fred Hutchinson’s brother in Seattle,” Pierce recalled. “Nothing happened with the money. I was VP of the fund. We never heard from him, so we said we’ve got to keep this money in Chicago.

“We talked with the president of Northwestern Memorial Hospital. He said, oh, great, he’d love to work with us. That’s how we started Chicago Baseball Cancer Charities. Then we got with Children’s Memorial Hospital.”



Billy Pierce spoke at a dedication of a White Sox-sponsored field in the Mt. Greenwood neighborhood. Among those watching in the background were legendary baseball executive Roland Hemond (far left), Sox chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and then-Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. (Photo courtesy of Chicago White Sox.)

Golf works better than annual dinner

Pierce and Co. decided not to also stage an annual dinner.

“It’s a different clientele if you have dinner downtown – it’s not the golfing clientele,” he said.



Billy Pierce (center) has been at home on the links for four decades raising money for cancer research as chairman of Chicago Baseball Cancer Charities. (Photo courtesy of Chicago White Sox.)

been involved with these things since he started as owner. Their involvement has gotten bigger and bigger. Chris O’Reilly (executive director of Chicago White Sox Charities) helps.”

Pierce has returned the favor, appearing at charitable events Reinsdorf has spearheaded.

“I don’t think there’s anybody who could do more (than the Sox) as a team,” he said. “They’ve done so many things for charity. Without question, Jerry’s been the key man.”

Raising hundreds of thousands of dollars at one event is a far cry from Pierce’s early personal appearances in the 1950s.

\$50 standard for a personal appearance

“When we were playing, we’d go somewhere for nothing, a Little League banquet,” he said. “Someone talked to (Sox public relations director) Eddie Short, maybe if you charge \$50, we wouldn’t get so many requests. Well, he came out with that and we got so many calls it was ridiculous, it didn’t work out too well.”

As a Shriner after his career ended, Pierce became affiliated with Shriner’s Children’s Hospital in Oak Park. As head of the athletic committee, he raised funds via a golf outing that enabled kids to come to Comiskey Park to take batting practice.

“Our money doesn’t go for bricks and mortar. It’s strictly for cancer care and research. The White Sox are fantastic. Jerry Reinsdorf has been so supportive. They’re very big supporters dollar-wise. They’ll give me a skybox to auction off. Also baseballs and pictures to auction off.”

Reinsdorf followed in the tradition of his predecessor Sox owner.

“Bill Veeck was involved,” Pierce said. “He had a special \$2 ticket and we got the proceeds from that. Bill would come to our meetings, but he was nowhere near close to Jerry dollar-wise. We were his first cancer charities organization. He’s

Pierce also served one year as Sox TV color analyst teaming with Jack Drees on what is now Fox-32.

“We had a lot of fun (on the air), but the ballclub lost over 100 games,” Pierce mused.

His name still resounds well in Sox annals, after winning 186 games on the South Side from 1949 to 1961. Pierce later was a World Series hero for the Giants in 1962, coming within a Game 7 Willie McCovey liner to Bobby Richardson of earning a ring. He pitched in a different era.



Billy Pierce spoke at a Sox rally with team chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and then-Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley looking on. (Photo courtesy of Chicago White Sox.)

“I recalled how (Sox manager) Paul Richards was going to count pitches,” he said. “He did it, but after a week, he said, ‘Forget it, everybody’s different.’ Some pitchers were six-inning pitchers, but it was frowned upon. I went 16 (innings) one time.

“If you go out and lose 1-0, you’ve pitched a good ballgame. I had one year where I lost four 1-0 games. I was an overhand pitcher whose fastball moved toward right-handed batters. The slider gave me a pitch I could throw on 2-0, 3-1.”

Such baseball details pale to helping save lives, which Pierce’s efforts have done where dollars really count.