



Jim Kaat broke pitching down to the basics -- and did it quickly -- as a Sox ace in 1974-75. Photo courtesy of Ootpdevelopments.com.

Crafty Kaat quick-pitches his way into HOF consideration

*By Mark Liptak, White Sox historian
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Editor's Note: This year's Baseball Hall of Fame Golden Era Veterans Committee votes on Sunday, Dec. 7, in San Diego to elect up to five new members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. This is the second Veterans Committee meeting to consider candidates whose main contribution to baseball came between 1947 and 1972 -- popularized as the Golden Era of baseball. In Dec. 2011, at the first meeting, the 16-member Golden Era electorate selected Cubs (and 1974 Sox) third-baseman Ron Santo, who was inducted into the Hall of Fame in July 2012.

The results of the vote will be announced on Dec. 8. The Chicago Baseball Museum will be in San Diego covering this historic vote, which features five former White Sox players on the 10-person ballot (Minnie Minoso, Billy Pierce, Jim Kaat, Dick Allen, and Ken Boyer) -- the most of any big-league franchise.

As a baseball historical non-for-profit educational institution, the CBM will be advocating for these Sox candidates. Before the vote, the CBM will feature stories on four of these players. The CBM has published articles on Billy Pierce and Dick Allen. This story is on lefty pitcher Kaat, who came close to being elected in 2011, during the first Golden Era committee vote, missing out by only two votes when he was named on 10 of 16 ballots.

As the ace of the Minnesota Twins, Kaat squared off against the Dodgers' Sandy Koufax in Games 2, 5 and 7 of the 1965 World Series, notching a complete-game win in the first game, but losing the next two.

He won 16 straight Gold Gloves from 1962 to 1977, including his three seasons in Chicago.

Kaat topped out at 29.5 percent in 1993 on the BBWAA voters ballot, on which he first appeared in 1989. After 2003, he fell off the ballot with a final vote of 26.2 percent in his 15th and final year of eligibility. In 2005, Kaat got 43 of 83 votes in the newly formatted Veterans Committee Ballot that was composed of all the living Hall of Famers. He was the fourth highest vote-getter, missing out being elected by 17 votes (60 were needed to get 75 percent for election).

In 2007, Kaat got nine more votes and was second on the Veteran's ballot with 52 votes when 61 were needed to get elected. In 2008, he was again the second leading vote getter and got 38 of 64 votes or 54.1 percent (the voters were reduced to actual living Hall of Famers as writers and broadcasters who were winners of the Frick and Spink awards were no longer able to vote).

During his time in Chicago, Kaat was the ace of the Sox staff; he tallied a combined 14.9 WAR in 1974-75.

The final article, making the case for Minoso, will be forthcoming before the Dec. 7 vote in San Diego.

Jim Kaat pitched for 25 seasons and won 283 games.

That's an astonishing career. Twenty-five years... a quarter of a century. In that time Jim threw more than 4,500 innings and had a career ERA of 3.45.

They're amazing numbers by any standard — and surely Hall of Fame numbers.

With the Golden Era Hall of Fame voting about to take place and Kaat on the ballot, it's time to take a closer look at a man who not only excelled on the mound, but in the ensuing decades has shown himself to be one of the most intelligent announcers the game has ever seen.

But more than the raw numbers was the fact that Kaat seemed to reinvent himself as needed. He returned from a serious arm injury in 1967 and stayed effective. Then, he “quick pitched” his way to a pair of 20 win seasons with the White Sox and an All Star appearance when he was 37, an age when most pitchers are long out of the game. Finally, at the tail end of his career, he turned himself into a situational left handed relief pitcher, one of the first “specialists” and helped the Cardinals win a World Series in 1982. Kaat was nearly 44 at the time.

His ability spanned four decades as he made his major league debut at 20 in 1959 as a Washington Senator at old Comiskey Park and didn't end until 1983 with the Cardinals. Along the way there were 16 double-figure win seasons, three 20- or more win campaigns, 16 Gold Glove Awards, and two appearances each in the World Series,



Jim Kaat in mid-delivery as a Sox. Photo courtesy of Chicago White Sox.

League Championship Series and All Star Game. Like Pierce, Kaat was that rare individual to lead the league in different categories at different times:

- Games started: 1965 and 1966 (42 and 41 respectively, 625 in his career).
- Complete games: 1966 (19, 180 in his career).
- Shutouts: 1962 (5, 31 in his career).
- Innings Pitched: 1966 (304 2/3).
- Wins: 1966 (25, when he was named The AL *Sporting News* Pitcher of the Year).

Sox deal a surprise

Kaat, though, may have done his best work given his age after Sox GM Roland Hemond landed him from in a waiver deal with the Twins on Aug. 15, 1973. Decades later, Kaat said going to the Sox was a surprise, as he figured he was headed elsewhere.

“I knew that both the Yankees and Royals were interested in me and both were leading their divisions,” he recalled. “I had broken my wrist sliding into second base at Comiskey Park in 1972. Until then, I had developed a pretty good screwball, but after the injury I just could never get the feel of it again. I knew the Twins were disappointed in the way things worked out. I remember in the bullpen talking to our bullpen coach and I said that ‘I know I’m on waivers, but I’ve got some good years ahead. They are going to regret letting me go.’

“It turned out I got a call from Roland and he said the White Sox wanted me to join them. Roland also knew that I was a 5-and-10 man, the first one in fact.”

A 5-and-10 man, an important clause in Collective Bargaining Agreements since 1973, means the individual has spent 10 years in the major leagues — the last five with the same team — and had the right to refuse a deal.

“I was flattered the Sox were interested,” Kaat said. “Roland offered me a \$10,000 raise immediately. I was making \$60,000 then, and considering the money situation with Calvin Griffith, that was a big thing. It was about as good a deal as it gets.”

Kaat was reunited Johnny Sain, his old Twins pitching coach. Sain was one of the two best pitching coaches in Sox franchise history. He immediately went to work with Kaat to correct some issues.

“As soon as I got to Chicago, John and I went right to the bullpen,” Kaat said. “He believed in pitchers throwing every day. We threw there every day for a week. He had a



Jim Kaat was as much known for his superb fielding as his quick pitching. Here he is surrounded by his Gold Glove Awards at Comiskey Park. Photo courtesy of The Sporting News.

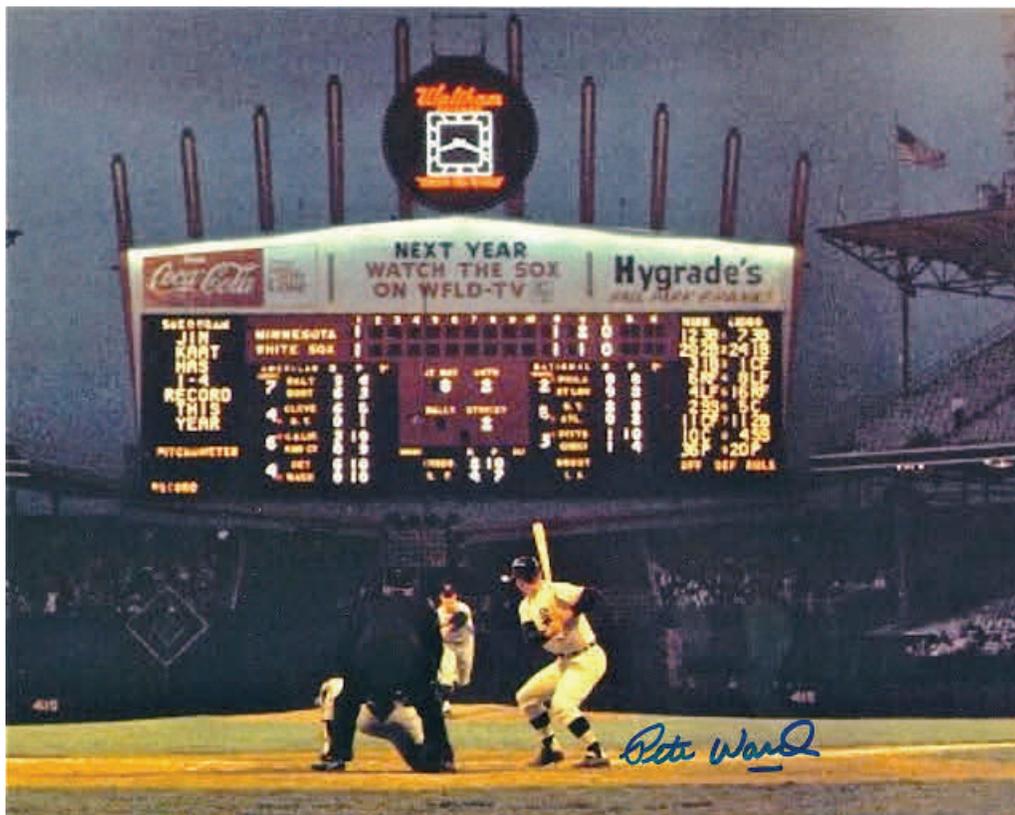
lot of ideas and tried to look at every pitcher individually. My arm wasn't bothering me and John worked on restoring my confidence.

“He believed in throwing strikes and getting ahead of the hitter. He also never believed in ‘wasting’ a pitch even if it was 0-2 and he never thought doing a lot of running did anything for a pitcher. He used to say if running was what did it, Jesse Owens would have been a pitcher. I remember one game I said to Brian Downing, ‘Brian, don’t even bother putting down any signs, let’s see how many outs we can get throwing nothing but the fastball.’”

Kaat was superb in a White Sox uniform. He won 12 straight decisions from the second half of 1974 through the middle of May 1975, one of the longest streaks in team history. He threw 27 straight scoreless innings from Sept. 4 through Sept. 18, 1974 and had a 10-strikeout game on Sept. 22, 1974.

Fast delivery catches hitters before they're set

The superb streaks resulted from one of the most unusual pitching deliveries in baseball history, the “quick-pitch.” After moving to the starting rotation in July 1974, Jim began working extremely quickly. Literally he'd get the ball back from the catcher, toe the rubber and throw without any type of involved delivery. Batters who didn't or wouldn't step out, or be given time by the umpires — especially plate procrastinators



Jim Kaat built up his reputation with the Twins. A year after his 25-win Minnesota season, he pitched to Pete Ward of the Sox in the first inning of a game at old Comiskey Park on May 17, 1967. The Sox won 5-4. Photo courtesy of bobmcwhitesox.blogspot.com.

like Mike “The Human Rain Delay” Hargrove — had no chance as pitches were crossing the strike zone before they even got reset. Umpires allowed Kaat to do this since it was within the rules. He also was given consideration as a 15 year big-league veteran.

“My arm speed was dragging and John and I were trying to find a way to correct it. I finally told him, ‘What if I stand like the bases were loaded and someone hit a ball right back to me? I’d take one step and throw the ball.’ That’s what I did. As far as the umpires, they liked the fact that I pitched quickly. It speeded the game up. The only guy who ever gave me trouble over it, and I don’t know why, was Bill Haller. He’d always be calling time out on me.”

In his two full years with the White Sox, Kaat threw 581 innings and won 41 games. But with Bill Veeck taking over ownership late in 1975 and money in short supply, Kaat knew he was probably going to be traded.

“Both Roland (Hemond) and Chuck (Tanner) had told me that based on what I’d done the previous two years, I’d deserved an increase in my salary,” he said. “At that time, the White Sox just weren’t making a lot of money. I knew that Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and the Mets were interested in a veteran starter and the White Sox asked me where I’d prefer to go if something could be worked out.

“I knew the Phillies from training in Florida and thought they were going to be a pretty good team, so that’s where I wanted to go. It turned out to be a good deal for both sides. I went to a contender and we won the division the three seasons I was there and the Sox got some young players.”

This lefty had nearly 9 MLB lives

There has to be a secret to pitching 25 seasons in the major leagues.

“I think it was a combination of things,” Kaat said. “I was left-handed and a control pitcher... not a hard thrower, so I wasn’t going to ‘lose’ a lot off my pitches to start with. I also learned early from Eddie Lopat how to make adjustments during a game. Later in my career, I started to move from a full-time starter to spot-starting and then to relief. It finally turned out that when Whitey Herzog took over the Cardinals, he wanted me to become just a lefty / lefty specialist. So my work was limited and I was able to keep performing.”

This may be the time Kaat is finally recognized for his achievements with the ultimate honor getting into the Hall of Fame.

“I’ve gone to inductions in the past and have had guys tell me, ‘Don’t worry, we’re going to get you in,’” Kaat said. “It would be a thrill and honor and I think I’ve got a better chance now than in the



Kaat in his windup delivering a pitch in Arlington Stadium in Texas. Photo courtesy of [Main Line Autographs.com](http://MainLineAutographs.com).

past. I hope it happens, but I won't lose any sleep if it doesn't. The other thing is that if it does happen, the regret will be that my dad won't be here to see it. He raised me with a sense of baseball history and with what the Hall of Fame means."

If Kaat goes in, he won't be wearing a White Sox hat on the plaque because of his limited time with the team compared to his days in Minnesota. But he's still remembered by Sox fans of a certain generation as an outstanding pitcher on the South Side.