



Minnie Minoso was an all-around talent, as his Gold Gloves for outfielding excellence showed. Here, Minoso (from left), center fielder Jim Landis, shortstop Luis Aparicio and second baseman Nellie Fox show off their Gold Gloves at old Comiskey Park.

Making the case (again!) for Minnie Minoso

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 '74 Sox) third baseman Ron Santo, who was inducted into the Baseball 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, Dick Allen, and Jim Kaat. This final article makes the case for Minnie Minoso before the historic vote.

This story is on Sox institution Minnie Minoso, who came close to being elected in 2011, during the first Golden Era committee vote. The Cuban Comet missed out by only three votes, when he garnered nine of 16 votes.

Minoso just turned 89 (or is it really 92?) last week (Nov. 29) and still possesses the same amazing energy level that he displayed on the field in his continued role as Sox goodwill ambassador.

Minnie was first eligible for the Hall of Fame in 1969, when he received a scant 1.8 percent of the BBWAA vote. He didn't again receive another vote until 1986, five years after his final major league cameo appearance in 1980. In 1986, he got 20.9 percent of the vote; he never drew more than 21.1 percent (1988) before his BBWAA eligibility lapsed after the 1999 ballot, 50 years after he broke in with Cleveland in 1949.

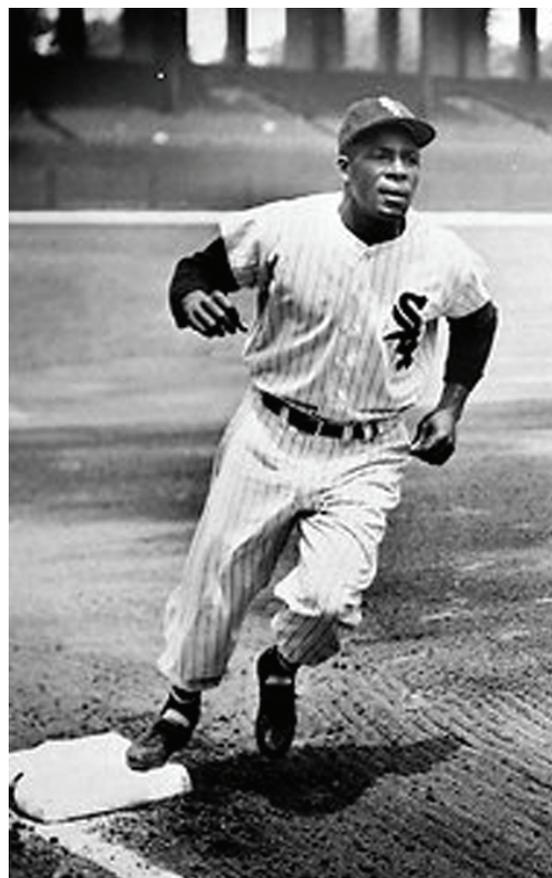
By the late 1950s, Minoso was a national idol for his native Cuba. But Fidel Castro's revolution changed that status. Minoso's personal property, including land holdings, was seized by the new government in 1959. Sadly, he has never returned back to his native land, cut off from family members.

Minoso blazed the trail for Latin players Roberto Clemente, Juan Marichal, Orlando Cepeda, Rod Carew and Tony Pérez that led them collectively on the path to the Hall of Fame. In July 2000, at his own Hall of Fame induction ceremony, Pérez recalled an impoverished youth much like Minoso's on a Cuban sugar plantation and cited Minoso as his personal inspiration for success.

Yet Minoso has remained on the outside looking in as the mentor and role model for the next generation of Latin players, especially those who hailed from Cuba, like Tony Oliva and Luis Tiant, who are also on the ballot this year.

In 2003, after dropping off the BBWAA ballot, Minoso got 16 of 81 ballots cast in the newly formatted Veterans Committee ballot that was composed of all the living Hall of Famers, including Ford Frick (broadcast) and Spink (print) award winners.

In 2005, Minoso got only 12 of 80 votes (60 were needed to get to the 75 percent election level).



A typical Minnie Minoso-in-motion leading the way during the Sox's 1950s "Go-Go" years.

In 2006, Minoso and Buck O'Neil appeared on the special 35-member final ballot to recognize Negro Leaguers, with Minoso's brief career with the New York Cubs taken into account. The vote was announced on Feb. 27, 2006 and 17 Negro Leaguers (all deceased, including Effa Manley, the woman owner of the Newark Eagles) were elected. Both O'Neil and Minoso failed to make it to Hall of Fame in that special election. No final vote totals were announced, though some academic members of the special committee did discuss later what they thought was the final vote tally. For Minnie it was great personal disappointment for him.

But the pass-over of O'Neil, who had become the keeper of the flame for the Negro Leagues, set off a national firestorm of criticism for the Hall of Fame. The saintly O'Neil, first African-American big-league coach with the Cubs in 1962, ended up delivering the induction speech at Cooperstown for the 17 new members of the Baseball Hall of Fame in July 2006. He died the following October. In 2008, the Hall of Fame created the Lifetime Buck O'Neil achievement award, for which O'Neil was the first recipient (posthumously).

In 2007, Minoso got 12 votes of 87 on the Veteran's ballot and needed 61 to get elected.

In 2008, Minoso failed to make the Veteran's Committee ballot that listed just 10 players, but did include Dick Allen and Jim Kaat.

Prior to the last Golden Era vote, the White Sox produced a top notch symposium on Nov. 17, 2011 to raise awareness for Minoso's Hall of Fame bid that included Minnie himself; several of his teammates on the Sox 1950s teams, including Billy Pierce; many former Cuban players, including Perez recounting Minoso as inspiration for Cuban players that followed; academic historians, including University of Illinois history professor Dr. Adrian Burgosⁱ; baseball writers. and statisticians. The symposium made a compelling case for Minoso.



Minnie Minoso always has been an inspiration for younger players, as he was sitting with Sox infielder Marcus Semien (center) and then-Sox reliever Donnie Veal at a symposium on the Negro League at U.S. Cellular Field earlier this year.

Sox Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf was shocked that Minnie did not get elected. The CBM had worked hard on behalf of Minnie to get elected in 2011 and was certain of eight votes prior to the election, one short of his final total.

In Jan. 2012, the CBM honored Minnie Minoso with the 2011 Jerome Holtzman award at the 66th annual Pitch and Hit Banquet for his significant contribution to the promotion of Chicago baseball and the preservation of its history and tradition.

In December 2012, WTTW-TV (Ch. 11), Chicago's PBS outlet, aired "Baseball's Been Very, Very Good To Me: The Minnie Minoso Story," produced by Tom Weinberg that provided an up-close and personal view of Minoso the man and his unbridled joy for life and the game of baseball.

Minoso's profile rose high in Aug. 2013 with a visit to the White House and photo op with President Obama, who honored "about a dozen" former Negro League players to "mark their contributions to American history, civil rights and athletics."

In 2014, the Sox choose to not reprise their 2011 academic symposium on Minoso, but did send off a book highlighting Minnie's career to the 16 voters. However, this past June the Sox did produce an excellent seminar at U.S. Cellular Field on Cuban baseball, which included Minoso, Sox 2005 ALDS Game Three hero Orlando "El Duque" Hernández, 2014 AL Rookie of the Year Jose Arbeau and three other current Sox Cuban players. This seminar touched once again on Minnie's legacy as a true cultural pioneer that opened up the door for future generation of Latinos.



Some of Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn's earliest Sox memories involved Minnie Minoso, and he no doubt shared some with Minoso at The Cell in 2014.

Veteran Chicago media member Johnny Reyes, who hails from Colombia, has known Minnie since the 1950s, said of a campaign to get Minnie finally elected in 2014:

"I firmly believe that our talking point about Minnie this time around should be designed on selling Minnie as the outstanding human being that he is. Not his stats alone, we all know that. The Committee Members know that, and any baseball expert or fans knows his stats. Are they aware of the kind and gentle and caring human being that is Minnie Minoso? We should not care about what he wears for his induction, Sox cap, Cleveland cap or a Cuban cap. We care about the person being given the fair consideration that he deserves as a good human being.

"If it is true that respect and dignity and character count for those being considered, Minoso stands out as a beacon over the last six decades of the game. He is a sportsman with dedication and hard work as a mantle he wore well. And if the Golden Era voters remember that, then Minoso deserves the Committee support. Ease off pushing his record and push the person.

*By David J. Fletcher, CBM President
Posted Friday, December 5, 2014*

The criterion to earn a plaque for baseball immortality in Cooperstown requires outstanding on-the-field achievements and significant contributions to the game.

Probably nobody combines those two criteria as well as Saturnino Orestes Armas "Minnie" Miñoso Arrieta. And that is precisely why President Obama honored the Cuban Comet at the White House in Aug. 2013.

Minoso's Peter Pan eternal-youth-type joy to go along with his stellar statistics for the White Sox and three other MLB teams mandates again serious consideration for the Hall of Fame.

In Nov. 2011, Stuart Miller penned an excellent article in the *New York Times* on making the case for Minoso:

“Basic statistics yield a compelling case for Miñoso—in a 10-year span beginning in 1951, he finished in the top 10 in batting average eight times, and in the top 10 in steals nine times (leading the league three of those years and finishing second another three times). But he was no mere singles hitter — he was top 10 in doubles eight times (leading the AL once) and top 10 in triples six times (leading three times); he even finished 10th in homers twice. Similarly, while he was top 10 in runs scored nine times, he also landed in the top 10 in RBI five times. And while I believe Gold Gloves are often handed out for the wrong reasons, he did manage to add three to his mantleⁱⁱ. He had five years with an on-base percentage over .400, he was always at .374 or higher, and only once in the decade was he not in the top 10. His mix of walks and gap power meant he was in the top 10 in OPS (on-base plus slugging) eight times in 10 years.

Miller noted that Minoso would do whatever it took to get on base, including his propensity for getting hit by pitches due to a combination of his crouching batting style and head hunters of the era. Minoso holds MLB record for most years leading the league in hit by pitch (10) and was hit a total of 189 times.

Looking at Minoso's WAR stats (Wins Above Replacement — the statistic that analyzes how many more wins a player brings his team than a replacement-level minor leaguer) as Stuart Miller pointed out in 2011, Minoso's credentials and potential Hall plaque are buffed to a bright finish: “Seven times he was among the top five in the American League for WAR among position players, and twice — in 1954 and 1959 — he ranked first.”

Minoso ranked in the top 10 in WAR seven times, including the top five four times, and led the league in 1954 with an 8.3 mark. His 52.1 WAR over that 11-year stretch ranks eighth in that era; everyone else from among the top 13 is already in Cooperstown.



Minnie Minoso is flanked by fellow Cuban stars, Hall of Famer Tony Perez (left) and Luis Tiant.

A natural at hitting, fielding and hustling after cutting sugar cane in his youth, Minofo had a short---but brilliant--- three-year Negro League career that included a couple of East-West All-Star Games at old Comiskey Park.

The New York Cubans won their only Negro League World Series title in 1947, defeating the Cleveland Buckeyes with a team that included such notables as Luis Tiant, Sr., and Martín Dihigo, along with the then-22-year-old Miñoso at third base.

Color line cost Minofo several prime years

Segregation probably cost Minofo at least three years of big-league service and must be taken into account when one evaluates his entire baseball career. Like Jackie Robinson, he was an older rookie because of the color of his skin.

When scout Bill Killefer watched Minofo and recommended him before the 1948 season to Bill Veeck, then in his first ownership stint with the Cleveland Indians, it was a second-generation Veeck-Killefer connection. Killefer had been manager from 1921-25 for Cubs president William L. Veeck, Sr., father of Bill Veeck.

At the CBM's "One Family, Two Teams: The Impact of the Veecks on Chicago Baseball" program in 2012 at the Chicago History Museum, Minofo talked about being signed by Bill Veeck and how much he appreciated the Baseball Barnum.

Minofo's story and impact our national pastime has been way too long neglected and was far under the national radar.

Minofo did it all: Hit by a pitch 198 times, seven MLB All-Star games (plus two East West Negro League All-Star games) and three Gold Gloves (which understates his defensive skills because Rawlings did not start the award until 1957).

As Jay Jaffe pointed out in his analysis in *Sports Illustrated* making the case for Minnie: "A lifetime .298 hitter, he was the rare ball-player who had no weakness, one who could win games in every way possible — at the plate, on the basepaths and in the field."ⁱⁱⁱ

Jaffe points out: "From the 1951 to 1961 seasons, during the Golden Era of baseball, Minofo was on a very short list of best all-around players in the major leagues. In the 11-year period, he ranked second in hits (1,861), extra-base hits (579), total bases (2,879), runs scored (1,078) and triples (81) among American League players. His .305 batting average was fifth overall."

A man in love with Chicago and with baseball

After tearing up the PCL for two seasons, the Indians traded Minofo to the Sox in 1951 in a three-team deal. The dark-skinned Cuban broke the color line in Chicago, and he immediately electrified the Sox fan base.

On May 1, 1951, he became the first black player on the White Sox, hitting a 415-foot home run in Comiskey Park off the Yankees' Vic Raschi on the first pitch of his first at-bat.

Minoso's break-in season was one for the ages. He led the AL in 1951 with 14 triples and 31 stolen bases (remember, this was a slugging-first, base thieving-last era). He scored 109 runs and batted .324 in just 138 Sox games. He was the runner-up for the AL Rookie of the Year.

You see him around Chicago all the time in his role as the senior Sox team "ambassador" and in just being, well, Minnie. He enjoys life and life enjoys him. He is a man in love with the city that adopted him from the moment he first wore Sox pin-striped flannels.

"When I came to Chicago May 1, 1951, I fell in love with this city and its people," Minoso said. "When you fall in love with anyplace you are in, you stay. The only thing I got was love (from the fans). I pay back my respect and my love to the fans. They know me and I know them. They give me love and respect, where else would I have this?"

In Nov. 2011, appearing in front of a Sox locker at U.S. Cellular Field that celebrated his career, and the Sox, Minoso confessed, "To be in the Hall of Fame is my last wish in this life." In June 2014, at the Cuban baseball player symposium, he expressed the same feelings—that making the Hall of Fame while he is still living is very important.

Then again, when you're 89 years old - or is it 92? - and your last wish on Earth is in the hands of the 16 members of the Golden Age election committee, it's not easy to put so many thoughts into words.

Not getting in the Hall of Fame in Dec. 2011 hurt. "Don't put me in the Hall after I'm dead," Minnie said then. "I want to taste it, like a good steak. I want to enjoy it." He had expressed that getting finally admitted to Cooperstown was his last wish in his long and colorful life.

Missing out on Minoso-Santo induction

It could have been one of the greatest Chicago baseball stories ever, all right. After decades of frustration and disappointment, Minoso and Ron Santo could have been elected to the Hall of Fame together. Two players, two teams, one town. It would have taken place one year after Santo passed away and 50 years after Minoso became the first Sox player to break the color barrier.

If only a few votes had changed, the dream would have become reality.

"What can you do?" Minoso said. "What do people expect me to say? I will not complain about it. I won't open my mouth and say anything bad about anybody. It's not my style. I will always smile even if I hurt inside."

As Santo supporters will tell you, the road to Cooperstown, N.Y., can be a long and bumpy one. The former Cubs third baseman was eligible for 32 years before he finally was inducted in 2012.

Minoso's playing prowess and unique contributions on and off the field to the game are clearly a combination worthy of the Hall of Fame. Before his death in July 2008, Je-

rome Holtzman, Major League Baseball's first official historian, went on record stating: "Minnie's a pioneer, just like Jackie Robinson."

The sociological impact of Minnie being the pioneering Latin star, and his career statistics make him deserving of election to the Hall of Fame.

Take in account that Minoso blazed the trail with pride and dignity for Latin players much like Jackie Robinson did for African-Americans not long before him - a distinction that is Minoso's and his alone — and any reasonable doubt about his Hall of Fame credentials is erased once and for all.

I sincerely hope that I never have to write another article that makes the case for Minoso to get the honor that he so richly deserves.

He deserves at least 12 of the 16 votes from the Golden Era Committee.

Endnotes

- i. Adrian Burgos Minoso's pioneering role can't be overlooked By Adrian Burgos / Special to MLB.com | Nov. 1, 2011.
- ii. Stuart Miller *New York Times* Nov. 8, 2011 The reason why Minnie only was a three time Gold Glove winner was the fact that the award didn't exist until he was 35 years old.
- iii. Jay Jaffe <http://www.si.com/mlb/2014/11/03/hall-fame-golden-era-ballot-part-2-minnie-minoso-luis-tiant>.



CBM President Dr. David Fletcher with Minnie Minoso. The CBM has campaigned multiple times for Minoso's election into the Hall of Fame.