



## ***Ray Herbert recalls surprise 20-win Sox season in '62***

*By Mark Liptak*

*Posted Wednesday, October 30th, 2013*

Winning 20 games is a feat in any era.

It's especially tough in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with pitchers working on four days' rest and getting 35 or fewer starts. But it wasn't a given in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when a bigger strike zone, no DH and four-man rotations increased the odds of a 20-win season for a capable starter.

Some of the best-known Sox pitchers of modern times have not won 20 while working on the South Side – Mark Buehrle, Tommy John, Joel Horlen. Instead, some surprising names reached that pitching benchmark like Ray Herbert, Esteban Loaiza and Jim Kaat.

Herbert connects to the great Sox pitching staff of the 1960s. “Excellent” is the word that best describes a group that lead the American League in ERA in four of five seasons between 1963 and 1967, that produced 11 All-Stars from the pitching staff, that had two 20- game winners, three 19- game winners, a “Fireman of the Year”, and four league leaders in ERA during the decade.

The names roll off the tongue...Gary Peters, Joe Horlen, Juan Pizarro, Tommy John, Hoyt Wilhelm, Eddie Fisher and Wilbur Wood. But there were also pitchers rather unheralded, rather forgotten, who also contributed to an organization that averaged 96 wins a year from 1963 to 1965, and 92 wins between 1963 through 1967. How many fans remember guys like Don Mossi...Don McMahon, Frank Baumann, Dom Zanni, Jim Brosnan, Dave DeBusschere and Johnny Buzhardt?



**Ray Herbert warming up at Comiskey Park during his surprise 20-win season in 1962 . Photo credit: [www.sfmsports.net](http://www.sfmsports.net).**

Herbert was acquired by the Sox on June 10, 1961, part of an eight-player deal with Kansas City. The deal saved the season as the Sox took off shortly afterwards on a stretch where they won 19 of 20 games. They ended the year 86-76 and in the first division. Herbert won nine games in the second half of the 1961 season. He'd go on to win 20 games in 1962 and was the winning pitcher for the American League in the second '62 All Star Game, played at Wrigley Field.

In 1963, Herbert put together a streak almost unmatched in franchise history. Ray threw four consecutive complete-game shutouts, had a scoreless streak of 38 innings and fired seven shutouts for the season to lead the American League. He still was an effective pitcher in 1964, but missed time with an elbow injury, a factor that led him to being traded to the Phillies before the start of 1965.

Herbert, who had been in the major leagues since 1950, was one of the unheralded Sox pitchers of that decade who found success with manager Al Lopez and pitching coach Ray Berres.

Ray will be celebrate his 84<sup>th</sup> birthday in December at his home in Michigan. We recently had an in-depth chat with him:

**Mark Liptak:** Ray, the White Sox acquired you in June 1961. Do you remember how you found out about the deal and what was your reaction to it?



**Joel Horlen (with open shirt) and Sox teammates celebrate his 1967 no-hitter. Despite statistics even stingier than Ray Herbert's, Horlen never won 20. Photo courtesy of the Leo Bauby collection.**

**Ray Herbert:** “We were in Detroit and I got called into our manager’s office. Joe Gordon told me I had been traded to the White Sox. Anytime a player gets traded from a last place team to a contender, he’s always happy and the Sox were always a contender for the pennant.”

**ML:** Ray Berres may have been the best pitching coach in the major leagues at that time. Did he suggest any changes to you?

**RH:** “The first thing that Ray would do is take you out to the bullpen and watch you throw. He immediately suggested some minor corrections and also suggested that I use my slider more. I didn’t really throw a curve that well and the slider gave me something different to throw to the hitters.”

**ML:** What kind of pitcher were you?

**RH:** “When I was coming up very few teams had pitching coaches in the minor leagues. You pretty much had to learn for yourself. What I learned, sometimes the hard way, was to throw strikes and keep the ball down. I threw three quarters and had a natural sinker. My pitches would break down and in to hitters, especially right handers. My fastball was in the 90s and I tried throwing a curve, although it was never really that good. “

**ML:** You had pitched in the major leagues for nine seasons before 1962 so you were very experienced, but it all came together that year as you went 20-9. What was that year like for you?

**RH:** “Working every fifth day gets you into a groove. You refine your control and that gives you confidence. It gets to the point where you always seem to get ahead of hitters. You throw one strike, then two strikes and the hitters become defensive with their swings. Pitching in Chicago also helped. That was a big ballpark, and we had a great defense. I was a ground-ball pitcher and the guys behind me, especially in the middle of the infield, would make the plays.”

**ML:** In late July of that year you were named as a replacement for the injured Ken McBride to the All Star game. How did you find that out and what went through your mind?

**RH:** “We were in New York, it was a Sunday and we were on the plane flying back to Chicago. Al Lopez walks up to me and said something about a guy getting hurt and that they wanted me to replace him. Actually I thought that the reason they picked me was because the game was in Chicago and we were flying back to Chicago so all they had to do was give me some cab money to get to the game (laughing).

“It happened so quick that you didn’t have time to think, ‘Wow, I’m going to the All-Star Game!’ Unfortunately my wife and family weren’t able to get down to see me play. They were in Michigan, which is where my home in the off-season was. It just happened so fast that they weren’t able to make arrangements to come down.”

**ML:** Did you know you were going to pitch in the game?

**RH:** “Yes, but again I didn’t have a lot of time. Ralph Houk was the manager that year, so I get to Wrigley Field and I go into the locker room. Houk comes up to me and says, ‘We’re down to four pitchers today, you’re pitching and you’ll go second,’ which meant that I’d throw the middle innings. In those days they played two All Star Games and a lot of guys on the club had all recently pitched so they weren’t available. “

**ML:** In that game at Wrigley Field you pitched three innings, allowing no runs on three hits and got the win. Tell me how you felt pitching that day and facing guys like Willie Mays, Stan Musial, the Cubs’ George Altman and Frank Robinson. Were you nervous?

**RH:** “Mark I played my whole career and never thought about who I was facing in a particular at bat. I always had the ability to focus and concentrate right now. I never worried about the future and I still don’t. I never considered, ‘Oh, I’m facing Willie Mays,’ or ‘That’s Mickey Mantle.’ That was my job, playing baseball. I was never nervous. Now I respected those guys, they were great players.” (Author’s Note: Herbert

pitched the third through the fifth innings, facing 10 hitters. He allowed an infield single to Mays, a single to left by Kenny Boyer and an infield single from Dick Groat. He induced a pair of double plays and finished his work, getting Hank Aaron to ground out. He was the winning pitcher in the A.L.'s 9-4 win.)

**ML:** What do you remember from your 20<sup>th</sup> win that season? (Author's Note: Herbert won the final game in 1962, beating Bill Stafford and the Yankees 8-4 in New York on Sept. 30, 1962.)

**RH:** "I remember that I didn't pitch very well that day. Lopez took me out after five innings or so. I gave up three or four runs. Al said to me, 'You're horse(bleep) today, you're lucky. Go take a shower...' We were able to win the game, though."

**ML:** That off-season you had a little trouble coming to terms on a contract, didn't you?

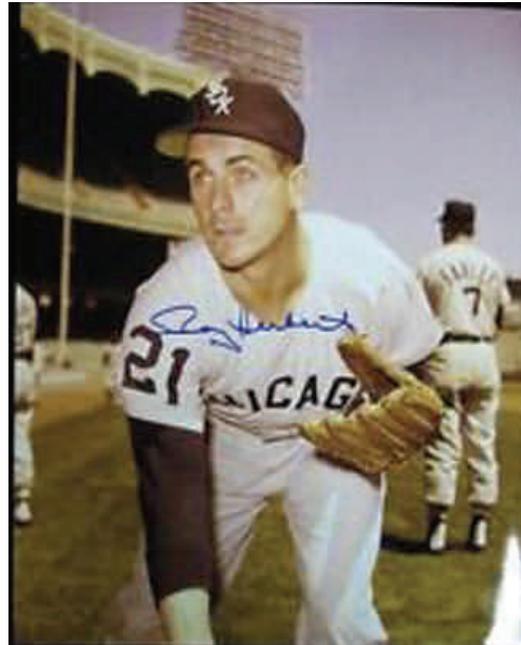
**RH:** "I had been in the major leagues 12 years, just won 20 games and was making \$24,000. Ed Short was the Sox GM and he offered me a deal with only a \$2,000 raise. I didn't think that was fair and held out for two weeks. Ed and I finally agreed on a deal worth \$28,000."

**ML:** You put together one of the most incredible streaks in franchise history when you tossed four straight shutouts from April 18 through May 14, 1963 and had a streak of 38 straight scoreless innings. How does a pitcher do something like that? (Author's Note: Ray started his incredible streak by beating Kansas City 3-0, allowing three hits. On May 1, he beat Baltimore 7-0, allowing four hits. May 9 saw Ray beat New York 2-0, allowing two hits. And on May 14, Ray took out Detroit 3-0, allowing six hits. He threw four straight complete games, four straight shutouts and only allowed 15 hits in 36 innings).

**RH:** "Like I said, sometimes you get in that groove where you just don't make any bad pitches. You seem to get all the breaks, the guys behind you make all the plays and the fact that it was earlier in the season helped. Hitters always start the year behind the pitchers and it takes them awhile to catch up. Early they just aren't that strong."

**ML:** Do you remember how the shutout streak ended?

**RH:** "We were in Baltimore and the Orioles catcher hit a disputed home run. I say disputed because in those days Baltimore had a metal railing that ran across the top of the left field fence. It was to help stop fans from falling over onto the field. The bar was held up by concrete posts so there were gaps between the top of the wall and the rail



**Ray Herbert at Yankee Stadium in 1964, the year the Sox finished one game behind the Bronx Bombers. Photo credit: [www.krukcards.com](http://www.krukcards.com).**

itself. Our left fielder swore that the ball went through the gap between the wall and the railing into the seats. That should have been a ground-rule double, but the umpire didn't see it that way." (Author's Note: The game was played on May 19. The Oriole hitter was catcher John Orsino, who led off the third inning with his home run. The Sox left fielder was Dave Nicholson. Herbert would pitch 8 2/3 innings that day, giving up three runs in a game the Sox would win 4-3 in 11 innings.)

**ML:** You won 13 games that year for the 94-win White Sox. What was the difference between you winning 20 games in '62 and 13 in '63?

**RH:** "Sometimes it's just a case of not getting runs that day. It happens."

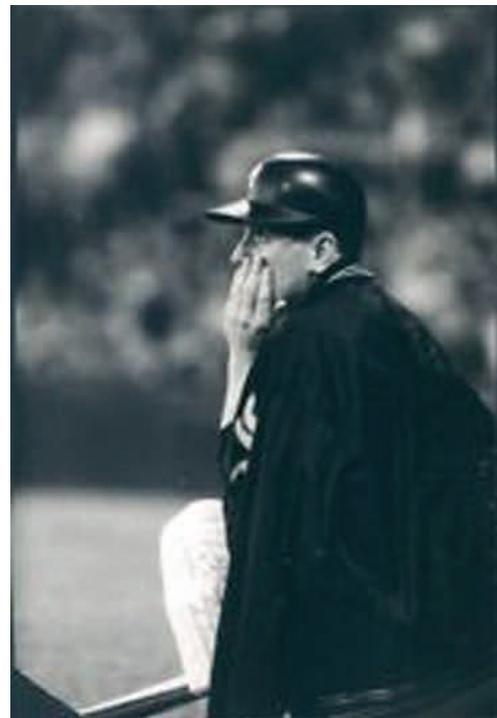
**ML:** You had been averaging around 30 starts a season until 1964 when you only started 19 games, winning six. Were you hurt at all?

**RH:** "I was on the disabled list for over a month. I got hurt batting in Cleveland. I started swinging at an inside pitch and saw that it was going to hit me so I pulled back and turned my right arm as I did so. The weight of the bat pulled my elbow back; it snapped it and I hurt the muscle around it.

"I actually went out and pitched the next inning. But it was hurting and when I got back in the dugout I told Al that I was hurt. Al looked at me and said, 'What do you mean you're hurt? You threw fine the last inning.' I said the arm was hurting me and that I needed to be taken out. I guess Al thought I was jaking it, trying to get out of the game. Why he would think that after I spent 13 years in the major leagues I don't know, but he took me out, the trainer looked at me and it didn't seem to be too bad.

"I went to bed that night and got up the next day and had trouble raising my arm. Even worse was the way my arm looked. I got dressed, went to the stadium and saw Al in the locker room. He asked me, 'How's your arm?' I got my shirt off and said 'What do you think?' Al looked at me and said, 'Jesus...you need to see a doctor!' My arm was purple from the elbow all the way down to the wrist! I broke some blood vessels along with injuring the muscle around the elbow when my arm jerked back getting away from that inside pitch."

**ML:** 1964 was a bittersweet season for the Sox. They won 98 games and lost the pennant by one game to the Yankees. What were your recollections of that season, especially after the final game when the realization set in that the Sox barely missed a trip to the World Series?



**Ray Herbert in the on-deck circle at old Comiskey Park. He hurt his arm pulling back from a close pitch while batting. Photo credit: [www.soxphotos.com](http://www.soxphotos.com).**

**RH:** “We knew we had to keep winning but also we knew the Yankees had to lose. During our game we saw the score of the Yankee game; they had a big lead and knew that we just weren’t going to win it. The team had a great year but there wasn’t a lot of celebrating in the locker room afterwards. As for me I didn’t feel that I was that involved with the year because I had gotten hurt.” (Author’s Note: The Sox finished 1964 by winning their last nine in a row, closing the season out at home beating Kansas City 6-0 for their 98<sup>th</sup> win. New York, however, had built up such a lead down the final two weeks that when they beat Cleveland 8-3 on the final Saturday they clinched the pennant. The Yankees lost the last day 2-1 to the Indians, making the final margin a single game.)

**ML:** You played for Al Lopez. What was he like as a manager?

**RH:** “Al was a top man who really knew baseball and baseball strategy, but he was hard to play for. If you did one thing wrong, you were in his doghouse. Some guys like Luis Aparicio never had any trouble with him; other guys like Jim Landis had a lot of trouble with Al. I already told you how he reacted when I hurt my arm but I remember another story of how he embarrassed Floyd Robinson.

“We were at home on a Saturday afternoon. It was a national TV game and I think it was 1963. Floyd was up in the first inning and he hit a little popup. He ran about half-way down the line then slowed up as the infielder caught the ball. Jim (Landis) brought his glove out to him in the outfield and they started warming up between innings. Lopez didn’t like the fact that Floyd didn’t run the ball out the entire way so while they are in the outfield, Al turns to one of the guys on the bench and says, ‘You go in for Robinson.’ The kid ran out there with his glove. Floyd had his back turned so he never saw the guy and didn’t know what was going on. The kid must have said something like, ‘I’m in for you.’ Floyd went back to the dugout. Lopez looked at him and said, ‘I see you don’t want to play today, so you can have a seat on the bench.’ Floyd didn’t move or say anything the rest of the day.”

**ML:** Did Al get involved in the pitching aspects of the game or did he leave you guys alone? Did he ever call any pitches, for example?

**RH:** “Al usually didn’t do things like that. Once in awhile he’d call a pitch. I remember one time we were facing the Yankees in 1961 when Roger Maris had that great season. I had a lot of success with Roger by pitching him down and away. This day Al asks me, ‘How are you pitching Maris?’ and I said, ‘Down and away.’ Al said, ‘This time, I want you to throw him inside stuff.’ I said OK although I thought it was a mistake. Maris hit the pitch into the upper deck. I went into the dugout, looked at Al and said, ‘Do you still want me to pitch him inside?’ (laughing)

**ML:** In your days with the Sox you weren’t a bad hitter, you had five home runs and 47 hits. You took pride in your hitting, didn’t you?

**RH:** “I took my batting practice early on game day, they wouldn’t kick me out of the cages, I’d get my swings in. I won a few games with my hitting. I remember a game I won 3-2 where I drove in two runs, another time I remember hitting a home run off Ralph Terry of the Yankees to win a game and I remember the time I called a home run.

“It was in 1962, it was the day I won my 19<sup>th</sup> game. We were in Boston, it was late in the season, we were up by four or five runs late in the game and the Red Sox brought in a kid to pitch. In those days when the pitcher was going to hit, the leadoff man would bring his bat to home plate. That way the pitcher could get a minute or two more of rest in the dugout. I go out there and Jim (Landis) is waiting for me. I asked Jim if he knew anything about this guy, what he threw and so on. Jim didn’t. I said to Jim, ‘This kid don’t know me, he’s going to think this is just a pitcher, and throw me a fastball. I’m going to hit it out of the park.’ Sure enough, the guy throws me a straight batting-practice fastball and I hit it over the wall in left field. When I get to home plate Jim turns his back on me! I went into the dugout and all the guys turned their backs on me! Jim must have told them what I said and they were giving me the business.” (laughing) (Author’s Note: That game was played on Sept. 26, 1962 with the White Sox winning 9-3. Herbert hit his home run off Hal Kolstad in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning.)

**ML:** After the 1964 season you were traded to Philadelphia where you finished your career. What did you do after baseball?

**RH:** “I stayed in baseball. I was the home batting-practice pitcher for the Tigers from 1967 through 1992. I went to the World Series with them in 1968 and 1984 and went to the league playoffs as well. Never got a World Series ring, though. Jim Campbell, the Tigers’ GM, must have been the cheapest guy in the game and he just gave them basically to the players.”

**ML:** Do you still follow the game?

**RH:** “I watch the Tigers every so often, but a lot of times when I do it pisses me off...a guy will throw 75 pitches and here comes the stupid manager out to take him out of the game. I know when I pitched if I had a 2-1 lead late in the game if a manager came out to take me out I’d tell him, ‘You better have a bigger gun than me right now. If you don’t I’m not leaving.’”

**ML:** How’s your health, Ray?

**RH:** “Great. I feel good. No complaints. They are going to check my heart soon, they might put in a monitor to make sure my blood pressure is OK, but I play golf three times a week, work in the yard, cut the grass and in the winter I plow the snow. Like I said, no complaints.”

**ML:** Ray, can you sum up your time with the White Sox for me?

**RH:** “It was the highlight, the peak of my career. I enjoyed Chicago greatly. That’s the main reason why I go back as often as I do.”