



After 50 years, strange angles of Brock-for-Broglio lost to history

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Like a ghost dragging its ball and chain, the Lou Brock-for-Ernie Broglio trade on June 15, 1964 haunts the Cubs through the decades.

The swap of a Hall of Fame-bound “base burglar,” as the Cardinals later labeled him, for a curveballing right-hander who quickly broke down as a Cub rivaled the bungling of Greg Maddux’s contract in the winter of 1991-92 as the worst move in team annals.



Lou Brock (left) started to come on at the plate and on the basepaths in his final week as a Cub. Meanwhile, Ernie Broglio showed no evidence he was hurt.

And yet the passing of the half-century allows the real context of the deal, done by ne’er-do-well John Holland with the best intentions, to be lost to history. Add on a CYA attitude by one of the principals involved, and you have a ton of misdirection plays as to what really happened.

So on the 50th anniversary of the transaction that changed the direction of both the Cardinals and Cubs -- one for the better, the other for the worse -- here’s a primer on the pertinent facts and angles of what many consider the worst trade in history for any team.

- Brock was not the totally stumblebum, undeveloped player that the Cubs easily felt they could do without.

Although his 1962-63 numbers pale in comparison of his Hall of Fame statistics assembled later with the Cardinals, he actually showed an upward curve the more he played.

In '63, Brock batted .240 going into a July 28 doubleheader against the Cards at Wrigley Field. Starting the second game, he had the second-best day of any Cub that season after an Ernie Banks' three-homer outburst. He slugged two homers – ironically one off Broglio in the first – and added a triple, almost all in mediocre batting sight-lines in the late-afternoon shadows. That sparked the Cubs to a comeback 16-11 victory that ended in the lightless ballpark at nearly 7:20 p.m., one hour before sunset.

Brock has huge power day vs. Cards

This is the performance that no doubt registered in Cards manager Johnny Keane's mind when he later backed GM Bing Devine's inquiry into Brock's services. In the month-plus after the nitecap spree, Brock got hot. He raised his average to .278 – third on the Cubs after Ron Santo and Billy Williams in a pitcher's season – by Labor Day. A subsequent slump dropped Brock to a final .258, but he clearly showed his talent.

Chicago Sun-Times beat writer Jerome Holtzman clearly agreed. In an article a few days into 1964, Holtzman described Brock and Williams as "good ballplayers."

Holland must not have been scouting and analyzing his own player too well before he pulled the trigger on the deal late on June 14. In the seven games prior to the trade, Brock was 9-for-29, including a two-run homer, and stole four bases. He was coming on, but the rigidly-thinking Holland was determined to trade Brock for a Cardinals pitcher. Three weeks prior to the deal, the *Chicago Tribune's* Richard Dozer, who actually produced more scoops over the years than Holtzman, reported Holland had offered Brock to the Cardinals.

Holland was notorious for his impatience with young players. His home-grown prospects often were too young and inexperienced when promoted. Holland summoned Brock straight from just one season in the minors way down in Class C St. Cloud (Minn.) in Sept. 1961. Brock thus did the majority of his development, which should have taken place in the high minors, with the Cubs instead.

He was most infamous for shaky outfielding in the Wrigley Field sun field in right. Brock said he played mostly night games in St. Cloud, and nobody taught him how to flip his sunglasses tracking balls in the sun in Wrigley.

Holland was just as impatient shipping Brock out as he was rushing him to the Cubs.

Devine denies he traded injured pitcher

- Was Ernie Broglio hurt when he came to the Cubs?

Devine, then a senior scout in his 80s, vehemently denied knowingly trading an injured pitcher when he was interviewed on the Diamond Gems radio show on the 40th anniversary of the trade in 2004. Off Broglio's Cardinals performance in the spring of 1964, there's no clear evidence his elbow was about to blow out. He was just 3-5, but had a complete-game victory on May 30, 1964, allowing just one run with six strikeouts. He also had an earlier complete-game shutout. No wonder Holland believed Broglio, coming off an 18-8 season in 1963, was the missing link to complement a strong Cubs starting Big Three of Dick Ellsworth, Larry Jackson and Bob Buhl.



John Holland (left) discussed dealing Brock for a Cardinals pitcher with Bing Devine (right) for weeks prior to pulling the trigger on the trade deadline.

Given Holland's impatience, the focus went back to Devine with the knowledge Major League Baseball mandated that medical information be exchanged between teams when they consummate a deal as a result of the Brock trade, according to former Cubs GM Salty Saltwell. Brock led the Cards to the World Series in 1964. The next month, Broglio underwent elbow surgery, then tried to come back too quickly the following spring training.

The only tangible evidence of an awry Broglio took place two weeks before the deal, when a lingering groin injury led him to be treated by the Cubs team physician while the Cards were in Chicago. He was also pulled in the second inning of his May 24 start after just four batters. Nothing in his Cards pitching line indicated anything was out of order.

The first physical manifestation of Broglio's elbow problems took place Aug. 23, 1964, more than two months after the trade, in New York. Broglio woke up in his hotel room complaining his elbow had "locked up." In response, roommate Joey Amalfitano decided to play comedian by tossing Broglio the room key. Broglio flew back to Chicago to be examined. He did not pitch again until Sept. 1.

Broglio overworked soon before elbow ails

A few days before the elbow locked, Broglio was handled in barbaric fashion by Cubs head coach Bob Kennedy. In an Aug. 17 start, Broglio was routed in a 2 2/3-inning start in Philadelphia. The next night, faced with a spent pitching staff in a long game, Kennedy summoned Broglio to finish the game with a one-inning outing in the 16th inning. The back-to-back outings could not have helped whatever deterioration was going on in Broglio's elbow.

Interestingly, Broglio then spun off three decent performances in which he lasted at least 6 1/3 innings while giving up two earned runs in each game. He did not pitch again in 1964 after his Sept. 11 start – ironically against the Cards. Broglio could have pitched injured all along until he no longer could throw the ball with any velocity.

“In 1964, conditions such as UCL tears were diagnosed only with open surgical procedures after a physical examination suggested such a problem,” said Dr. David Fletcher, president of the Chicago Baseball Museum. “No MRI capability to look inside a joint existed and would not emerge as a technology until the 1980s. Broglio probably had an undiagnosed UCL tear.

“Other elbow conditions to look for would be lateral epicondylitis (tennis elbow), Medial epicondylitis (golfer's elbow) and cubital tunnel (ulnar neuropathy). It is not uncommon that injured workers (in this case a journeyman ball player) would hide injuries to keep going and making a living. I see that every day in my occupational medicine practice.”

Fletcher was right. Experiencing the insecurity of the job and the macho credo to play even when hurt, pitchers typically worked through pain. In the same season in '64, Broglio's Cubs teammate Dick Ellsworth experienced tendinitis in his left arm when he tried to throw his effective slider. He was hampered, but continued to take his regular turn in the rotation. After winning 22 in 1963, Ellsworth — who at one point was 10-6 — slumped in the second half to finish 14-18.

So with the medical capabilities of the time and pitchers keeping their own counsel on pain, we have to absolve Devine. Besides, in this different era of GMs having special rapport (especially over convivial drinks) in spite of geographic rivalries like the Cubs and Cardinals, it's unlikely a well-respected fellow such as Devine would knowingly hoodwink frequent trading partner Holland.

Kennedy revisionist in handling Brock

- Head coach Kennedy certainly practiced revisionist history and appeared to try to distance himself from involvement in the Brock debacle during several conversations in the 1990s, when he had retired to Mesa, Ariz.

Kennedy claimed he knew Holland wanted to trade Brock, and said he opposed the deal. He also ruminated that he should have tossed off the reins and let Brock run more in front of Williams and Ron Santo. Yet Kennedy already had the baserunning blueprint in Maury Wills' 103 steals in 1962. Brock was considered a faster runner than Wills.

Kennedy was tough on Brock. When the right fielder misplayed two seventh-inning balls in the sun one 1963 spring afternoon at Wrigley Field, Kennedy took Brock back to the outfield after the game to hit him fungoes. He reportedly got on Brock for being picked off first at another time.

When the morning of June 15, 1964 commenced and Kennedy knew Holland would announce the trade, he said he wanted to make himself scarce on the Cubs' off-day (a Monday) to avoid comments on the deal. He told wife Claire that he'd go off to play golf

himself. In reality, Kennedy went to a north suburban course to play with Williams and Santo. Williams later shook his head when informed of Kennedy's claim of solo golf.

Bottom line: if Kennedy thought Brock was on the come and could be a top-of-the-lineup sparkplug, why didn't he go to Holland to discourage him from making the deal?

- Kennedy needed to think outside the box in handling Brock. Maybe he should have been shifted to left, where he proved an acceptable – but no more – outfielder over the long run with the Cardinals.

Such a move would have removed him from the hazards of the late-afternoon sun, which Williams learned to handle in his time in right field. Williams said he would have gladly moved from left to right to accommodate Brock. Williams ended up as the Cubs' regular right fielder in the 1965-66 seasons, and played there sporadically in several seasons afterward. It was obvious the tough defensive responsibilities hampered Brock's offensive game as a Cub.

- The Cardinals made up for their early mistake with Brock in heisting him. Coming out of Southern University in 1960, Brock thought he'd sign with the Cardinals. But the scout who was supposed to get him into the fold instead went after landing pitcher Ray Washburn. Brock came to Chicago and participated in a tryout at Wrigley Field. The Cubs signed him.

- The Cubs signed not only Brock, but also Bill North, future two-time American League stolen-base king. They've never fully learned the value of speed -- which never takes a day off and can be employed in all kinds of weather -- in cozy Wrigley Field. Even now, it's doubtful baseball bossmen Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer, growing up in New England, are fully aware of the 1984 impact of the Bob Dernier-Ryne Sandberg "Daily Double" that produced 77 stolen bases to spark a lineup that led the National League in runs. That kind of baserunning production has never been duplicated by subsequent Cubs teams.



Decades later, Bob Kennedy said he did not want Brock traded, but the-then Cubs head coach apparently did not try to persuade GM John Holland to call off the deal.

Vintage Baseball Radio

Ernie Broglio talks about his infamous reputation in connection to the Lou Brock trade:

<http://www.chicagobaseballmuseum.org/chicago-baseball-museum-media.php#Ernie-Broglio>

Lou Brock recalls an unusual off-season job to supplement his Cubs earnings:

<http://www.chicagobaseballmuseum.org/chicago-baseball-museum-media.php#Lou-Brock>