



The Passing of Minnie Minoso and Remembrances by His Sox Teammates

By Mark Liptak

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From the time he arrived to make his White Sox debut on May 1, 1951 until his passing early Sunday morning March 1, 2015, Saturnino Orestes Armas (Arrieta) "Minnie" Minoso loved Chicago, the White Sox and baseball.

Minoso, the first Latin player to appear for the White Sox, reportedly was 90 years old although many feel he was actually older when he passed away in his car. Minoso had gone out Saturday night for a friend's birthday party when he apparently fell ill and pulled over in the Lakeview neighborhood, according to police and family. He was found early Sunday morning unresponsive.

Minoso's story is one of overcoming hardship and prejudice first in Cuba where he was born and raised and then in his day-to-day dealings with life in the 1950's in America. He changed people's attitudes by always being courteous and showing a smile regardless of the circumstances.

Minnie played 17 games with the Indians in 1949 and 1951 when he was acquired by the Sox in a three way deal also involving the Athletics. The deal was driven by Sox G.M. Frank "Trader" Lane upon the recommendation of manager Paul Richards. Richards had first seen Minoso play in San Diego in the Pacific Coast League and immediately pushed for his acquisition. When all was said and done, Philadelphia sent Lou Brissie to Cleveland; Cleveland sent Sam Zoldak and Ray Murray to Philadelphia; the Athletics sent Paul Lehner to the White Sox, the White Sox sent Gus Zernial and Dave Philley to Philadelphia and the Indians sent Minoso to the South Side of Chicago.



Minoso was one of the original "Go-Go" boys. Photo credit Associated Press.

Minoso had a Sox debut for the ages. On May 1, 1951, he faced the Yankees Vic Raschi and on the second pitch hammered a drive into the center field bullpen for a two run home run. The drive went an estimated 415 feet. That same game a youngster named Mickey Mantle also hit his first major league home run.

Minoso finished that first season in Chicago with a .326 batting average, 10 homers and 76 RBIs in 146 games for the Indians and White Sox. He also had a major league-best 14 triples and an AL-best 31 steals. He ended up fourth in the league MVP voting yet incredibly wasn't named rookie of the year. The Baseball Writers Association of America gave that award to Yankee infielder Gil McDougald who finished far behind Minoso in the MVP voting. It was the start of a lifetime of slights by writers associated with baseball.

Minoso was one of the original "Go-Go" boys along with outfielder Jim Busby and infielder Nellie Fox as Paul Richards ushered in the "golden age" of White Sox baseball. From 1951 through 1967 the White Sox had 17 consecutive winning seasons, had seven years of 90 or more wins and won the pennant in 1959. Later the Sox would add more speed and defense with the acquisition of outfield "Jungle" Jim Rivera, catcher Sherm Lollar and the call up's of outfielder Jim Landis and shortstop Luis Aparicio.

In 1954, he had his second-straight fourth-place finish in Most Valuable Player voting; hitting .320 with 19 homers, 18 triples, 19 stolen bases, and 119 runs scored.



Minnie Minoso, Jim Landis, Luis Aparicio and Nellie Fox show their Gold Glove trophies to the crowd before a game at Comiskey Park.
Photo credit www.whitesoxinteractive.com.

about the incident. "Minnie told me he always felt that my uncle wasn't deliberately trying to throw at him and how much he appreciated him coming to the hospital the next day to see him."

Minoso was a nine time All-Star, a three time Gold Glove Award winner and at various times led the American League in games played, hits, doubles, triples, sacrifice fly's and stolen bases. He'd finish a career which also included token appearances in 1976 and 1980 as part of Bill Veeck promotions, with a .298 average, 186 homers and 1,023 RBIs.

Minnie was also hit by a pitch 192 times because of how closely he stood next to home plate. One of those instances occurred on May 18, 1955. The Yankees Bob Grim, a no windup pitcher hit Minoso in the left temple region. Minoso had to be carried off the field on a stretcher. Current White Sox Director of Broadcast Operations, Bob Grim, was named after his uncle and said that he spoke with Minoso

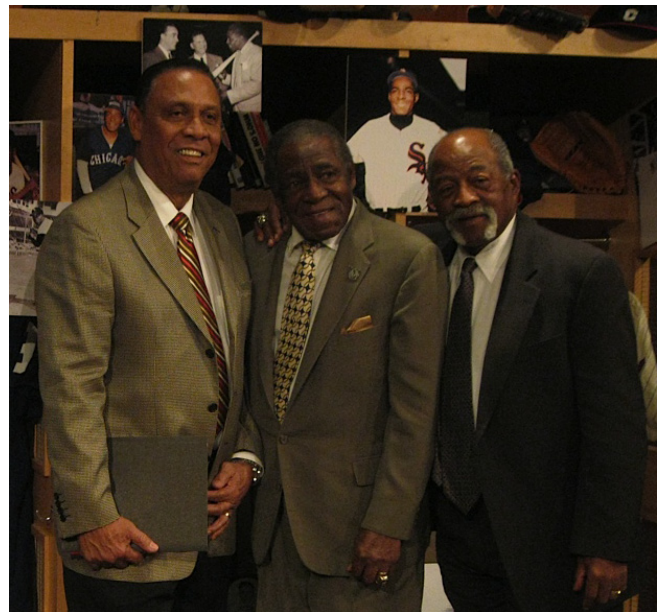
Minnie did miss the Sox championship season of 1959 having been traded back to the Indians as part of the Early Wynn-Al Smith trade. In the Sox pennant clinching game the night of September 22, 1959 in Cleveland, Minoso was thrown out early in it at home plate on a strike from Smith in left field. He was given at season's end though, an honorary A.L. championship ring from the White Sox.

Bill Veeck reacquired Minnie before the start of the 1960 season and on opening day Minoso again made a spectacular return blasting a pair of home runs and driving in six RBI's in the 10-9 win over Kansas City. Minoso's first home run that day was a grand slam; his second in the last of the ninth inning was the game winner. Minnie had one of his finest seasons that year hitting .311 with 20 home runs, 105 RBI's and 17 stolen bases.

After the 1961 season he was traded to the Cardinals for first baseman Joe Cunningham. Ironically both Minoso and Cunningham were at the same baseball banquet the evening the trade was announced. Minnie also played for the Senators in 1963 before coming back for 30 games with the Sox in 1964.

It was Minnie's fondest desire to get into the Hall of Fame yet time after time after time he was passed over in the voting by individuals who never got to see him play in person and may have held his token appearances in 1976 and 1980 against him. His highest percentage during his 15 years on the writers' ballot was 21.1 in 1988.

Stat guru Bill James however had this to say about him in his analysis of his career in 2001, "Had he gotten the chance to play when he was 21 years old, I think he'd probably be rated among the top thirty players of all time," James wrote. James listed Minoso as the 10th best left fielder in baseball history. He was considered by the Veterans Committee in 2014 and fell short of the required percentage for induction. Roland Hemond, former Sox G.M. was one of those on the voting committee last year and pushed for Minoso. "It still bothers me that Minnie didn't get in. I didn't do enough to see him though I guess." Hemond's disappointment clearly came through the telephone when he said that.



Minnie Minoso with fellow Cubans Tony Perez and Luis Tiant taken Nov, 2011. Photo credit Dr. David Fletcher, Chicago Baseball Museum.

Making Minoso's Hall of Fame snub even more surprising is because of his impact on Latin American's and their view of baseball. Many rightly claim Minnie was the "Jackie Robinson of Latin America" as he was one of the first Latino players to make an impact

in the major leagues. Not only did Minoso have to face racial prejudice like Robinson but he also had to overcome the language barrier since he spoke very little English at first. His impact on Latinos was not lost by those big league players who followed him however. "Orestes Minoso was the Jackie Robinson for all Latinos; the first star who opened doors for all Latin American players," said Puerto Rican native and future Hall of Famer Orlando Cepeda. "He was everybody's hero. I wanted to be Minoso. (Roberto) Clemente wanted to be Minoso."

"Every young player in Cuba wanted to be like Minnie Minoso, and I was one of them," Hall of Fame slugger Tony Perez said. "The way he played the game, hard all the time, hard. He was very consistent playing the game. He tried to win every game. And if you want to be like somebody, and I picked Minnie, you have to be consistent." Perez in fact, openly campaigned for Minoso in his Hall of Fame acceptance speech in 2000.



Minoso family at Chicago Baseball Museum event in September, 2012. Photo credit Steve Starr.

Many of those who played with Minnie or against him were quick to share their thoughts on his passing.

Billy Pierce- "Minnie was my real good friend since we first were teammates back in 1951. I was just with him at Sox Fest last month. He was a loyal friend, always good to my family. I can't ever remember him turning down anyone who wanted his autograph. Just at Sox Fest he and I stayed for about thirty minutes afterwards signing for all the fans. Minnie was just a good all-around player...he could run, hit for average, and was a

great left fielder. Remember one year he threw out the tying run at the plate in the All-Star Game. He always gave one hundred percent every day and he played through injuries. I can't remember the year but for a solid month he played with a badly hurt shoulder and still hit .300"

Ken Berry- "I saw Minnie a lot in spring training for a few seasons or when I'd be called up in September. He was always very outgoing with a smile on his face. He always hustled and was a very aggressive base runner. You could tell he enjoyed the game."

Ray Herbert- "He was always a nice person and carried on a good conversation with you. He played the game the way it was supposed to be played, he played hard and he played the game clean. He could hit the ball all over... he stood close to the plate but could handle the bat. With that "inside-out" swing he could go the other way on a pitch. He was quick to get the head of the bat out over the plate so he could hit to all fields when he needed to."

Joe Horlen- "Minnie was a really neat guy. He was always ready to go, ready to play. He just loved the game."

Gary Peters- “Minnie was a great player and he was a great player for a long time. It’s incredible when you think about how good he was for the number of years that he played. He loved baseball more than anyone I ever knew or was ever around. It seemed like he never aged. Pitching against him he liked the ball inside, he had a quick bat.”

Pete Ward- “He was one of the fastest guys I’ve ever seen. He could really run. He was as popular as any player Chicago has ever seen. Personally I never saw him without a smile on his face, simply a great guy.”

Roland Hemond- “When Minnie was named first base coach he’d always try to get some roses and he put them inside his uniform top. When he’d go out to the coaching box he’d look in the stands for a pretty lady, unbutton his jersey and take out a rose to give to her in the seats. I’d always have to try to come up with some for him and sometimes they were artificial because we couldn’t find real ones. He was dearly loved by White Sox fans over the years.”

The Chicago Baseball Museum extends condolences to the Minoso family and to the White Sox organization on the passing of one of its best and most beloved players. May he rest in peace.

As we did in 2011 and 2014, the CBM will work hard in 2017 the next time the Golden Era Veterans Committee meets to help Minnie finally get elected to the Hall of Fame. He was one of the top players of his generation who brought excitement to the game every time he crossed the white lines.



CBM President Dr. David Fletcher with Minnie Minoso. The CBM has worked tirelessly to get Minoso into the Hall of Fame.