

CHC: George Archie was a Vanderbilt Coach

by Bill Traugher

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George Archie was one of those ball players that was good enough in the minor leagues, but not quite a major leaguer. Archie was born in Nashville on April 27, 1914. Like a lot of baseball players at the time, World War II disrupted development and some promising careers.

Archie prepped at Nashville's Father Ryan. He was signed by a scout of the Detroit Tigers in the fall of 1933. His first season in professional baseball was with Muskogee, Class C of the Western Association in 1934. The right-handed infielder would roam in the minors with Beaumont, TX (1935-36), Indianapolis (1937) and Toledo (1938).

At the end of the 1938 major league season, Archie was called up to Detroit. He appeared in three games and was hitless in two pinch-hit at-bats. The next two seasons (1940-41), Archie was in the Pacific Coast League with Seattle where the Tigers traded him.

A 1939 newspaper article describes the awareness major League baseball had of Archie's talents:

"If it had been the turn of the National League, instead of the American, to take first choice in the 1939 draft, then George Archie, first baseman of the Seattle Rainiers of the Pacific Coast League, could look forward to playing for the Washington Senators in 1940. That sounds paradoxical, but here's the explanation:

"An 'inside' source revealed that the Philadelphia Nationals, cellar occupants in their loop, were hoping the St. Louis Browns would pass up a Seattle player so they could snare Archie. Whereupon, the Phillies were to have completed a deal, already on the fire, by passing him to Washington, as Clark Griffith is sweet on the Tennessee flash.

"However, the Browns threw a bender into the proceedings by grabbing Alan Strange, ace shortstop of the Rainiers. As a result, Archie won't be sold until after the 1940 season, because the loss of Strange so weakened the club that Jack Leliveit and Company can't afford to let another key man go.

"Those who consider Egypt's famous Sphinx a silent hombre, should have sat at Sick's Stadium this past season and taken a gander at Archie. George lets his bat, his mercury-heeled feet and his glove do his talking, with such good effect that experts on the Far West slope dubbed him 'The Coast League's second Hal Chase.'



George Archie as a Detroit Tiger

"Archie established a personal record for loquaciousness in a series against San Francisco. During infield practice, a thrown ball over his head in the direction of the Seal dugout. Archie turned and shouted, 'Look out.' Previous, 'Yes' and 'No' were considered long speeches for him."

The 1940 season in Seattle was Archie's best minor league year. The first baseman batted .326; drove in 102 runs while recording 47 doubles. For that effort, Archie was named the MVP of the Pacific Coast League.

Archie began the 1941 season with the American League Washington Senators. In 105 games he batted .269, but was traded to the St. Louis Browns in September. His totals for 1941 include 114 games; .277 batting average (113-for-408); three home runs and 53 RBI's.

This newspaper article by Shirley Povich wrote about Archie's release by Washington:

"The release of George Archie by the Nats to the St. Louis Browns at the waiver price should substantiate the skepticism toward Pacific Coast League hot shots. Archie brought a .326 batting average from the Coast to the Nats and, like Lou Novikoff who led the league in hitting last year, flopped all over the big league premises.

"Archie had certain talents, but hitting a curve ball wasn't one of them. He could muster only a .270 batting average for the Nats and within a couple of weeks he was in the league it was noised about that any pitcher could get him out on a No. 2 pitch.

"He was supposed to be a fancy fielder at first base, also but he couldn't field with Mickey Vernon who, up from the International League, wasn't supposed to be a fancy fielder. But Vernon was platoing in a better league, despite the Pacific Coast League's classification as AA. For years now, baseball men have argued that the Coast League does not deserve its AA rating.

"Chief among Archie's talents was courage. There could be no complaint against him on that score. He volunteered to play third base for the Nats when there was nobody else around for the job, and he did a tolerable job of it. There was nothing polished about his play at third, but his throwing arm was entirely competent, and he came up with balls with his teeth, if necessary. He was at his best on hard hit balls."



Former VU player Marlin Keel (left) with Archie

Just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Archie enlisted into the army just two days after the attack. Archie did play baseball in the service and was on the German front line with the U. S. 65th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop in 1945. After his discharge in January 1946, Archie rejoined the St. Louis Browns.

Archie only appeared in four games for 1946 before being released. He played a few more

years in the minor league system and was a manager. He was also a baseline coach for the Nashville Vols. Archie became the Vanderbilt University head coach (1965-67). Under his guidance, the Commodores were 5-14 (SEC 1-11) in 1965, 2-16 (SEC 1-12) in 1966 and 11-12 (SEC 8-9) in 1967. It wasn't until 1968 that Vanderbilt would offer baseball scholarships.

"He was a very private man," said Marlin Keel who played for Archie and is a 1969 Vanderbilt graduate. "Mr. Archie was very quiet and loved baseball. He worked you hard in practice, as hard as you wanted to work. He knew the game, but he didn't flaunt that knowledge. In practice, he could do more with a fungo bat than any coach I'd ever seen. I played third base, and as long as anyone hit me ground balls I would field them.

"I'd go to the outfield and shag fly balls and he had the ability to take a fungo and hit the ball at the limits of your range. He would wear you out. He didn't talk a lot as he took a professional approach. He wasn't a big rah rah guy or give big speeches. He expected you to give 100 percent. Mr. Archie didn't talk much about his playing days and I cherished the time I spent with him.

Archie died on September 20, 2001 and is buried in Nashville's Mt. Olivet Cemetery.

"Mr. Archie pitched a lot of batting practice," said Keel. "One time I hit a line drive that he instinctually reached out for with his pitching hand and broke one of his fingers. He said that was the only time he had a broken finger in his whole baseball career."

If you have any comments or suggestions you can contact Bill Traughber via e-mail at WLTraughber@aol.com.