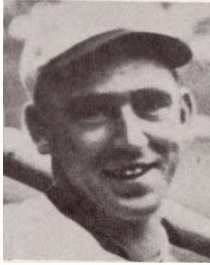


Mostil was the Mostest
by
Anthony Borgo



As I write this *Communicator* article pitchers and catchers from across the Major Leagues have already reported to Spring Training. Soon the entire team will begin preparations for either the Cactus or Grapefruit League depending on your favorite team. Last year, we saw a renewed excitement in Major League Baseball for the greater Chicago-land area. Both Cubs and Sox fans alike sat glued to their TV sets as the Chicago Cubs made it deep into the playoffs. Loyal Cub fans hoped for the unthinkable, a possible berth in the World Series. While, the White Sox faithful rooted for whomever it was that would finally knock the Cubbies off their pedestal. I must admit that I even

hopped on the Cubs bandwagon even with it being as crowded as it was, but, that is what winning does for a city. The Cubs created an energy and excitement that sprouted not only in Chicago but across the nation. In the 1920s, a single ballplayer brought the same excitement to the Whiting Robertsdale neighborhood. The fleet-footed Johnny Mostil became the biggest big leaguer to the town he called home, Whiting, Indiana.

John Anthony Mostil was born in Chicago, Illinois on June 1, 1896. A few years later his parents moved him to Robertsdale. At the age of 22, Mostil made his debut in the American League as a center fielder with the Chicago White Sox, the team that he would stay with for his entire professional baseball career. Johnny Mostil was handed the unenviable task when he became a member of the White Sox of making people forget about the legendary figure of Shoeless Joe Jackson, a player linked to the 1919 World Series scandal.

Mostil quickly made a name for himself with the White Sox insuring his name in baseball history. On April 30, 1922, Mostil moved from center field to left field, a position he had never played before. On that day, Mostil made two outstanding diving catches that helped save pitcher Cliff Robertson's 2-0 perfect game over Detroit. Robertson became only the third player in the 20th Century to pitch a perfect game. During a Spring Training game in 1925, Johnny Mostil became the only center fielder in baseball history to catch a foul ball. Mostil led the league in stolen bases in 1925 and 1926 and in runs scored in 1925, and four times in Johnny's career he batted over .300. He played in 972 games, had a .301 batting average, 23 Home Runs, and 376 RBIs. Mostil was also the MVP runner up for the 1926 season.

On July 10, 1925, Whiting proclaimed a day of honor for Mostil, as a way to repay him for all of the pride that he instilled in his hometown. Around three thousand of Mostil's one time neighbors made the pilgrimage to White Sox Park to give him homage. The great Standard Oil Band of eighty pieces were there; over a thousand children with the greatest noise makers on earth were on hand; and nearly two thousand men from all walks of life came to commemorate Mostil's great career. Mayor Walter E. Schrage saw it fit to issue a proclamation requesting all businesses to close at noon in order to make the journey, which saw over twenty buses and 300 automobiles traveling to the south side. Once in the ballpark there were speeches by local men, a performance by Nick Altock, the clown prince of baseball and a presentation of gifts to Mostil. William Schrage, the brother of the Mayor, presented Johnny Mostil with a \$600 diamond ring and a traveling bag. During the game Mostil treated the huge crowd with a great performance, getting four hits and a walk and two runs out of five at bats.

On May 19, 1929, during the fourth inning of a game held at Detroit, Johnny Mostil broke his right leg tripping over home plate on the uncontested front end of a double steal. The injury marked the end of his Major League playing days at the age of 33. Mostil then became a minor league manager in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and later worked as a scout for the White Sox. Johnny Mostil died in Midlothian, Illinois on December 10, 1970. Mostil played baseball at a time when it was known as the blue collar era of the sport, how fitting for a man whose roots are connected to the Whiting area. To learn more about Mostil or Whiting's baseball roots stop by the Local History



Room.