THE OFFICIAL INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS MAGAZINE

How Rocky Colavito Made His Mark as a Home Run Machine Pg. 24

SLUGGER

Herb Score and a Season for the Ages Pg. 12

THE SUMMER OF CHAMP Pg. 37



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#### **BATTING AVERAGE\***

## Len Koenecke

THEI HOS HOODIN	.000
John Cooney	.371
Francis Sigafoos	.370
Champ Summers	.368
Vernon Washington	.367
*2.7 PA / league game	

0 (1027)	Eon noonoono
1 (1935)	Ralph Shinners
0 (1933)	Ted Beard
8 (1978)	Lloyd Christenbury
7 (1934)	George Hogriever

385 (1927)

141 (1931)
138 (1921)
131 (1948)
131 (1923)
124 (1902)

**RUNS** 

#### DOUBLES

Francis Sigafoos **Ralph Shinners** Ernest Krueger Vincent Shupe Edward Brown

A.F. "Reb" Russell

53 (1933) 50 (1921) 45 (1924) 44 (1946) 44 (1922)

#### HOME RUNS **Rocky Colavito Champ Summers** Wally Post

Arturo DeFreites

Cliff Cook

38 (1954) 34 (1978) 33 (1953) 32 (1978) 32 (1961)

#### RBI

**Leslie Fleming** Edward Brown Len Koenecke Ernest Krueger Francis Sigafoos

143 (1948)	Doug Baird
133 (1922)	Joe Kelly
131 (1931)	Edwin Stroud
128 (1924)	Gary Redus
126 (1933)	Ralph Shinne

#### **STOLEN BASES**

Doug Baird	72 (1921)
Joe Kelly	61 (1951)
Edwin Stroud	57 (1966)
Gary Redus	54 (1982)
Ralph Shinners /	52 (1921) /
William Fox	(1903)



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#### LESLIE "LES" FLEMING | 1B, RF

BATS: LeftTHROWS: LeftHEIGHT: 5'10"WEIGHT: 185 lbsBORN: 8/7/1915 in Singleton, TXDIED: 3/5/1980 in Cleveland, TX

	G	PA	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	CS	BB	SO	BA
MLB TOTALS	434	1572	1330	168	369	69	15	29	199	7	8	226	152	.277
ind Totals	246	1042	865	163	285	55	8	40	212	4	**	170	86	.329

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#### **CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**

Following four full seasons in the major leagues with Cleveland, Les Fleming swapped out one Indians jersey for another. In an offseason trade that sent veteran first baseman Elbie Fletcher from Pittsburgh to Cleveland, Fleming found himself on the 1948 Opening Day roster for Triple-A Indianapolis.



Fleming was an established big leaguer at the time, leading all of Major League Baseball after appearing in 156 games

during the 1942 season, his first full season in the majors. He hit .292 (160-for-548) that season with 14 home runs, 82 RBI and an MLB-leading 23 intentional walks to land himself 25th in MVP voting. He then served in the Navy during World War II and missed the 1943 and '44 seasons.

Through five years with Cleveland (1941-42, 1945-47), he hit a combined .281 (361-for-1283) with 29 home runs and 191 RBI in 402 games played. Despite his track record in the majors, his numbers were falling, and he spent the entire 1948 season with Indianapolis.

In Triple-A, he thrived. He appeared in 151 games for the Tribe that season, hitting .323 (170-for-527) with 26 home runs and a franchise record 143 RBI. He led the Indians in average, homers, RBI and total bases (288) and anchored Indianapolis to its only 100-win season in franchise history.

That performance led him to break through to Pittsburgh's Opening Day roster in 1949, but the numbers didn't transfer. Through 24 games he had only driven in seven runs and had yet to hit one out of the park. His final MLB game came on June 9, but his career was far from over.

Fleming picked up right where he left off in Indianapolis. Through 95 games, he slashed .340/.453/.556 with 14 home runs and 69 RBI to help the Tribe to a 93-win season. That year, the American Association Indians beat Montreal 4-2 in the Junior World Series to end the season as the best team in Triple-A.

He spent the next seven seasons falling from Triple-A to Double-A and ended his season in his home state with the Big State League Beaumont Exporters.

## HERB SCORE and a season for the ages

SCORE'S 1954 Campaign IS Remembered as the 'Best ever' by a Tribe Pitcher

#### by CHEYNE REITER

Sefore Max Schumacher joined the Indianapolis Indians front office as the club's ticket manager in 1957, the now-Chairman Emeritus of the Tribe fondly remembers the 1954 season. He was a college-aged fan attending games at old Victory Field who, like most Indians fans, waited every fourth or fifth day to watch a young left-hander named Herb Score pitch. The '54 season wasn't Score's first or last year spent in Indianapolis, but it was undoubtedly his best.

After debuting for the Indians at age 19 in 1952 and walking more batters (62) than he struck out (61), Score returned to Single-A Reading in '53 where his walk total skyrocketed. There, in Eastern Pennsylvania, Score issued 126 walks in 98.0 innings, but he was young and still learning. The following spring, Score pitched his way back onto Indianapolis' roster and the rest, as they say, is history.

The Indians began their 95-win season by winning 12 of 15 games in April, with two of those victories going to the 20-year-old Score. His first win on April 25 at Columbus featured 11 strikeouts in a 7.0-inning complete game, and the second was another complete-game effort – nine strikeouts over 9.0 frames vs. the Toledo Sox. Those performances were only scratching the surface on what would become an unforgettable Triple Crown season for the southpaw.

Fans flocked to the corner of 16th and Harding for the strikeouts. And they, like Score, survived the countless walks despite improved command. More times than not, they left the ballpark happy, too, with the Indians emerging victorious – the Tribe went 27-6 in games when Score took the mound. His starts were often wild and erratic, but nobody could deny that when he was on, the lights went out for the opposing team. If he was off, well, good luck, he still might dominate.

"We didn't have a stadium [radar] gun back then," Schumacher recalled. "He may have been throwing 95, 98, 101 [miles per hour] for all we know. His fastball was the best in the league."

Score's summer was just getting underway. He fanned 10 batters in his third complete game of the season to improve to 4-0. Over his next five outings from May 15 to June 1 – the fourth start featuring 13 punchouts – he walked a combined 44 batters. On May 19 at St. Paul, an 11-walk outing didn't deter Score or the Indians from earning a hard-fought 7-4 win. In fact, the Tribe never blinked as Score tried to find his groove; they won four of those five games while Score's personal record soared to 7-1.

In mid-June, Score began to command his pitches, at least on his terms, and he separated himself as the league's toughest hurler. It was not uncommon for the New York native to finish what he started. He rattled off nine consecutive starts with 10 or more strikeouts, the first eight with him going the distance. Amid that stretch, Score strung together five outings with 13, 14, 17, 13 and 13 strikeouts, respectively. He closed the regular season on an impeccable 19-start run where he threw 15 complete games and whiffed 10-plus batters 17 times.

Most impressive among his starts are his five regular-season shutouts and one electrifying postseason nod against Louisville:

June 11 @ Toledo (Game 1 of DH)	W, 7.0 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 2 BB, 7 K
July 3 vs. Kansas City	W, 9.0 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 7 BB, 13 K
July 12 @ Minneapolis	W, 9.0 IP, 6 H, 0 R, 0 BB, 17 K
August 7 vs. Minneapolis	W, 9.0 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 4 BB, 16 K
September 1 vs. St. Paul	W, 9.0 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 1 BB, 15 K
September 23 vs. Louisville	ND, 10.0 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 10 BB, 14 K

When looking at Score's '54 season, one name comes to mind; one that oddly enough belongs to another former left-handed Indianapolis Indian. He's commonly referred to as "The Big Unit."

"[Score] was similar to Randy Johnson," Schumacher said. "A big, hard-throwing left-hander with bad control, but thanks to [Cleveland coach] Ted Wilks, who helped [Score] achieve control of his pitches, he found out how to throw consistently over the plate."

Score's 22 wins and 2.62 ERA led the league, along with his 330 strikeouts that shattered the American Association singleseason record and was never broken when the league ceased existence after 1997. The previous strikeout record was held by Columbus' Charles Berger, who recorded 264 punchouts in 1906. Only six pitchers topped 200 strikeouts after Score's record-setting season, the high being 223 by St. Paul's Stan Williams in 1957. Score was rightfully named the Minor League Player of the Year at season's end.

Score wasn't the only standout player on Indianapolis' 1954 squad. He was joined by close friend and roommate, outfielder Rocky Colavito, who smacked a franchise record 38 home runs that year.





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"We didn't have a stadium [radar] gun back then. He may have been throwing 95, 98, 101 [miles per hour] for all we know. His fastball was the best in the league."

- Max Schumacher

"[Herb and Rocky] had one vehicle that maybe cost them a few hundred bucks," Schumacher and his wife of 61 years, Judy, remembered together. "It wasn't a 'junker' by any means, but Rocky was always the one doing the driving."

They both made their major league debuts with Cleveland in 1955, with Score recording nine strikeouts and nine walks in a complete-game victory at Detroit. Colavito clubbed 30 more homers in Indy

before joining Score in the majors in September. By that point, Score was putting the finishing touches on a memorable season. He was named an American League All-Star and went 16-10 with an MLB-leading 245 strikeouts en route to AL Rookie of the Year honors. Score again earned an All-Star bid in '56 and upped his MLB-best strikeout figure to 263, but a line drive comebacker to his face in '57 and subsequent arm injury in '58 derailed what looked like a potential Hall of Fame career.

Eventually, Score found his way back to Indianapolis for the 1962 and '63 seasons, likely by train, when the Indians were the Triple-A affiliate of the Chicago White Sox.

As told in Schumacher and author Mark Montieth's "Extra Innings: My Life in Baseball," Score didn't perform as planned during his final season and had a great fear of flying; he traveled by train throughout his playing career. Manager Rollie Hemsley gave Score permission to head to his home in Florida while the Tribe would finish their Governors' Cup



Championship in Atlanta, but Schumacher, in a one-on-one meeting with Score, insisted he join the team in Georgia before going home. Schumacher believes Score followed through on the agreement. That was the last time the two saw each other.

In 2006, both Score and Colavito were appropriately enshrined together into the Cleveland Indians Hall of Fame. Colavito got there by quickly becoming a fan favorite and hitting 374 career home runs in the major leagues. But for Score and his abbreviated big-league career, we can only wonder what could have been.

His 1954 season will live on forever in Indianapolis' illustrious history, and his first two seasons in the majors showed stardom.

"I don't believe in jumping and saying he'd have been a Hall of Famer, there's a lot to that and injuries are part of the game," Schumacher said. "But he'd have been a really good one. I know that."

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In his home state of California, Blake Cederlind has been keeping busy with hiking trails and throwing sessions at home. We sat down with the reliever to learn about new hobbies he's picked up, his favorite social media app and go-to order at an iconic fast-food chain.

#### **Q**: What new hobbies, or old ones, have you picked up in quarantine?

MANS

A: Definitely fishing. I've been hiking a lot, of course, so I go to the mountains here in California. I live in the Central Valley and people forget that it exists, but it's actually pretty nice over here.

## Q: What was your favorite subject in school?

A: I'd say science because it wasn't as bad as the other subjects. There was something about it that I really enjoyed.

.....

#### **Q**: Who has given you the best advice since you've been in baseball?

A: It's definitely Joel Hanrahan, Indy's pitching coach. He's taught me a lot, really. The best thing he's told me is not to be afraid to mess it up. I've carried that with me ever since I met him, and it's helped me a lot with different things.

#### **Q**: What's your favorite social media app?

A: It's not TikTok. I know that's the people's choice right now, but it's not mine. Snapchat is mine, for sure. I've been using it probably since it came out, so it's been a long time.

#### Q: Where can you find the best burger?

\_\_\_\_\_

A: Oh, that's easy: In-N-Out. My go-to order there is two two-by-threes (two slices of cheese and three patties in between two buns) with spread only. Their fries are a hit or miss, though. Some days they're cardboard and some days they're the best thing ever. You have to get them fresh.

#### Q: Best sports moment that you've witnessed?

**Blake Cederlind** 

A: When stunt performer Robbie Maddison jumped over the length of a football field on his bike during New Year's Eve was ridiculous. But it has to be Barry Bonds hitting home run No. 756. The place went crazy, I'll never forget it. I grew up an hour away from AT&T Park [now Oracle Park] so it's pretty special.

#### Q: What's a hidden talent that you have?

A: I can kick field goals really, really far and very accurately. When I was in eighth grade, I wasn't going to beat out the quarterback and I really wanted to be on the team, so I went out for kicker instead. I actually got really good at it. I mean, I can kick a 60-yard field goal like a beast.

#### Q: What movie or show can always make you laugh?

A: I don't do live shows, but my favorite is *Rick and Morty*. I've seen that show a couple of times over already. A specific episode doesn't stick out for me as the funniest in the show, but it's my all-time favorite.

#### Q: Which state do you most want to visit?

A: Probably Florida. Maybe the West Palm or Jupiter area, also Miami and Orlando would be cool. I just think Florida is super nice. It helps that Spring Training is in Bradenton for us, so I can just enjoy the state for a few weeks every year. THE OFFICIAL GIN OF THE INDIANS FOR: CIVILIAN DISPLAY



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When Jeff Clement went up to the plate against Syracuse in the bottom of the seventh inning, a triple to center field secured a cycle for the Tribe first baseman, just the third recorded by an Indian in the Victory Field era. His night started in the second inning with a double to center off Syracuse starting pitcher Tanner Roark. In his second at-bat, he stroked a soft line drive to center field for a single. Clement's sixth home run of the season came in the sixth inning to left field, putting him a triple shy of the cycle. The fly ball to center not only recorded Clement's cycle, it also extended the Indians lead over Syracuse and led to their 7-3 win.



Center fielder Rajai Davis went 1-for-3 vs. Charlotte in the final game of his Victory Field era longest hitting streak. In the 21st game of his streak, Davis blasted a first-inning home run for his fourth of the year with the Tribe. During the stretch. Davis batted .364 (32-for-88) and drove in 13 runs. He was called up the following day by the Pirates and spent the next eight weeks with Pittsburgh before being traded to San Francisco at the July trade deadline. He hit .279 (53-for-190) with one home run, nine RBI and 22 stolen bases at the major league level.



JUNE 8

The third inning at Ottawa was an offensive outpour for the Indians as they already led the Lynx, 2-1. Starting pitcher Everett Stull highlighted the inning with a grand slam and was one of two Tribe players that drove in four runs (also Kevin Barker). Outfielders Damon Hollins and Chris Jones each finished the game with four hits. Stull also limited Ottawa to four runs in 6.0 innings.

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For a third time in the Victory Field era, Indianapolis won by a record 16 runs on their home field when the Tribe beat Rochester, 16-0. Every hitter, including three in-game substitutes, scored at least one run for Indy. The Tribe batted around and scored six runs in the second inning. Lefthander Justin Wilson started the game for the Tribe and tossed 7.0 innings of four-hit ball to hold the Red Wings at bay with a 10-0 lead while the Indians extended the score in the seventh with another sixrun inning.



As the Indians struck out a Victory Field era road record 17 times at Rochester, including 13 by right-hander Boof Bonser, the team walked away with a 4-3 win with the help of a dominant bullpen and four-run sixth inning. The top of the sixth scoring started on third baseman Yurendell de Caster's game-tying solo homer to left. Left fielder Nate McLouth plated another run with a line drive double to left to put the Tribe up one. Then with the bases loaded and two outs, shortstop Shaun Skrehot gave the Indians insurance with a two-run single. The Tribe's bullpen held Rochester hitless in three innings of work to secure the comeback win.

# **JUNE 24**



Indians second baseman Junior Kennedy went 6-for-6 with two doubles, three RBI and three runs scored in a 15-7 win at Denver. Kennedy's six hits tied an American Association record. Center fielder Tom Spencer also smacked two home runs and had six RBI, and the Indians totaled 28 hits in the high altitude.

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Shortstop Josh Harrison hit two bases-clearing triples to plate six of the Tribe's 10 runs vs. Charlotte. With the bases loaded in the bottom of the fourth, Harrison connected on the first pitch of the at-bat against left-hander Charlie Leesman to turn a 3-1 deficit into a 4-3 lead. When Harrison went up to the plate with the bases loaded again in the fifth, the inning unfolded in similar fashion as he hit a triple to right off southpaw Santos Rodriguez. Harrison batted .300 (3-for-10) and had 11 RBI with the bases loaded for Indianapolis that season.





In just his third career game with the Indians, it only took five innings for left fielder Alex Presley to hit for the first Tribe cycle since 2003. It started with a triple in the first inning against righthander Billy Buckner and a single in the second. Presley contributed to the Tribe's second six-run inning of the game with a home run in the bottom of the third. Presley's double in the fifth completed the cycle, but he wasn't finished for the night. He ended the game 5-for-6 with two singles, two RBI and two runs scored in Indy's 15-3 win. The Indians also clubbed five home runs as a team, their most ever in a game played at Victory Field.

# JUNE 28



In his first appearance with the Indians since Aug. 31, 2005 vs. Toledo, right-hander **Ian Snell** again toed the rubber vs. the Mud Hens for a history-making outing. Snell struck out a Victory Field era record 17 batters in 7.0 innings as the Indians won, 2-1, in 10 innings against their divisional rival. The record-setting performance didn't stop there as 13 of those strikeouts were consecutive, another Victory Field era best.



#### by ANNA KAYSER

here's a feat in baseball that is so rare only 18 have achieved it since the late 1800s. First it was Bobby Lowe of the Boston Beaneaters on May 30, 1894. Then there was Ed Delahanty. Lou Gehrig. Chuck Klein. Pat Seerey. Gil Hodges. Joe Adcock. And then, on a Wednesday night in June 1959, there was Rocky Colavito.

Four home runs in a game, no more, no less. There have been players to hit five – four major leaguers, to be exact – but there's another time and place for their stories.

Colavito's career began in similar fashion to his game on June 10, 1959. Slow and steady but methodical, he walked in the top of the first inning. No one knew what would come next, but it was nothing short of greatness.

A similar sense of unknown followed when Colavito dropped out following his sophomore year at Teddy Roosevelt High School in the Bronx, N.Y., where he grew up.

"I had always wanted to be a major league player, so it wasn't a difficult decision for me," Colavito said. "I actually was a fair student – I wasn't outstanding, and I wasn't the worst. I think a lot of it was because I always wanted to play ball, my mind was always on baseball."

Just a mile and a half away from where one chapter for Colavito ended, another began. Two short blocks east and a long stretch down Lorillard Place turned 3rd Avenue from then-Teddy Roosevelt High School sits Crotona Park, home to a semipro baseball league.

Colavito's team, the Bronx Mohawks, played on what is now known as Roberto Clemente Ballfield that sits along the northeast edge where it meets Crotona Park Greenway. It's where Hall of Famer Hank Greenberg began his career and where the La Caribe Baseball League has called home since shortly after Colavito's time, developing stars like Red Sox slugger Manny Ramirez for the big leagues.

It's where Cleveland scout Hal Reason discovered a young Rocco Domenico Colavito and invited him to a tryout at Yankee Stadium, where Cleveland Farm Club Director Mike McNally was waiting.

"[McNally] saw the way I threw a baseball and I kind of showed him some power, I guess," Colavito said of his tryout performance. "He kind of took a shine to me over the other guys."

Colavito did more than show him some power. In an article from the Society for American Baseball Research, McNally – who died in 1965 – said of Colavito's ability to throw from the outfield: "I don't think I have ever seen a stronger arm."

That was all it took, and Colavito was signed by Cleveland as an amateur free agent prior to the 1951 season. He was placed with the D-League Daytona Beach Islanders as a 17-year-old and rose through the ranks of the organization with ease. He hit .275 in

#### THE ULTIMATE SLUGGER

his first professional season, .228 in 1952 split between two Cleveland B-League affiliates, and .271 in Single-A Reading of the Eastern League in 1953.

What he would become known for started to take shape in that 1953 season. He led the Eastern League with a career-best 28 home runs and 121 RBI. He had been hitting home runs at every level, but that was only the beginning.

The top of the third inning on June 10, 1959 marked a new beginning for Colavito. With one out and one runner on, he stood at the plate and watched to see whether his first home run of the evening would stay inside the left field foul pole. It did. But that was only the first.

Colavito made his greatest case for being a major leaguer during the 1954 season, when the vast majority of the pennantwinning Reading team from the year before graduated to the Triple-A Indianapolis Indians. On this team was Colavito's friend and roommate on the road, Herb Score, who would later have a major impact on that four-home run game.



#### "CLEVELAND BECAME MY FAVORITE PLACE IN BASEBALL TO PLAY." - COLAVITO

A 95-win season for the Tribe, in which it won a league pennant and reached the American Association Championship Series before losing to Louisville, Colavito led the charge right from the beginning.

He hit three home runs in a doubleheader vs. Louisville on May 4, two in the opener and one in the nightcap. On May 23, he notched a three-homer game while going 4-for-5 with seven RBI at Minneapolis. His June was highlighted when he hit a pair of home runs in the second leg of a doubleheader vs. Toledo.

All in all, Colavito finished the season with a league-leading 38 home runs, a singleseason Indianapolis franchise record that still stands. He led the Tribe with 116 RBI, 293 total bases, 94 runs scored and 75 walks.

"I had 28 home runs and 75 runs batted in at the halfway mark," Colavito said. "And then, like a lot of young kids, I hit a cold spot where I wasn't doing that well. The second half [or a little less] I only hit 10 home runs. But we won the pennant. The bottom line, the most important thing in baseball is to win and we accomplished that."

Following spring training in 1955, Colavito followed the big league club to Cleveland. Come Opening Day, however, a logjam of future Hall of Fame outfielders – including Ralph Kiner and Larry Doby – led to Colavito's return to Indianapolis for the season.

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It also led to Colavito requesting a trade from the Indians organization, feeling betrayed after the season he had in 1954. As fate would have it, however, the trade wouldn't occur for another five years.

So, he picked up in Indianapolis where he had left off. On May 1 in a doubleheader vs. Omaha, he hit three home runs and drove in seven RBI. He notched two more two-homer games on July 23 vs. Minneapolis and Sept. 4 at Toledo.

The season cumulated in a .268 average, team-leading 30 home runs and 104 RBI, and he tied with William Harrell for a teambest 30 doubles. On Sept. 10, his major league career began where it would later end: Fenway Park. He entered the game as a pinch runner and scored a run.

On Sept. 24, Colavito entered the second game of a doubleheader at Detroit as a first-inning pinch runner and remained as the right fielder for nine defensive innings. He entered the day 0-for-2 in his budding career, with two strikeouts to his name.

He hit a double to left field in the third inning for his first major league hit. Another double and two singles later, no one could deny he was a big leaguer. He added to his 4-for-4 performance by throwing out Earl Torgeson at third base on a fly ball to right field. His 14-year major league career had begun.

On April 25, 1956, he hit his first of 374 major league home runs. Over the next  $3^{1/2}$  seasons, he would never hit more than two in a game. So, when he hit his second on June 10, 1959 – off a slider down and a bit away from fellow Bronx native Arnie Portocarerro – it was nothing out of the ordinary.

"That's the way things go in baseball," Colavito said. "When you're going good, you can hit almost anything, and when you're not, they could throw right down Broadway and you don't hit it." His fifth four-hit game in a Cleveland uniform solidified him as a historic slugger. His first, that two-double game at Detroit, broke him through to the fans in Cleveland and he soon became a favorite not only on the field but off it.

"Cleveland became my favorite place in baseball to play," Colavito said. "The people took to me wonderfully. They were so good to me, and I in turn tried to do the same to them."

On his way out of the clubhouse postgame, he would walk from the first base side of the field to the third base side to get to his car. Kids would line up and wait for autographs.

Colavito remembers being one of those children, waiting for major league ballplayers and looking up to them for example. At a young age, he promised himself that if he ever made it, he would sign for every kid in line.

When he was able on the nights where the team had no bus or plane to catch, he would do just that. His wife knew not to have dinner ready until at least two hours after the game, and it took him only an hour to get out of the clubhouse.

"I used to grab one kid and I used to say, 'You line up and don't cheat. Make one line and I'll sign everybody here." Colavito said. "I didn't even have to say it after a while. When I came out of the clubhouse, one kid would always say 'Line up, he'll do everybody,' and I did. I kept my promise."

In 1956, he hit .276 with 21 home runs and 65 RBI with Cleveland. He had hit just .215 through June 14 to get him sent to San Diego in the Pacific Coast League for a month. When he returned and remained in Cleveland from July 24 through the end of the season, he hit .301 with 16 home runs. He finished second in Rookie of the Year voting and never returned to the minor leagues.

"I JUST LOOKED FOR THE BALL," COLAVITO SAID. "HE THREW ME A HIGH FASTBALL THAT WAS ON THE INNER PART OF THE PLATE, AND I HIT THAT ONE AS HARD AS ANY OF THEM."

> In 1957, he hit .252 with 25 home runs and 84 RBI. He notched two multi-homer games that year, the first of his major league career on June 7 vs. Washington.

Two years and three days later with his third home run at Baltimore, he broke his own single-game best on a pitch almost identical to the low and away slider he had seen before. As he ran out to right field following the shot, the fans stood and applauded, realizing they were on the verge of witnessing history.

In 1958, Colavito was on the verge of adding his name to another list in history. He finished the season third in American League MVP voting behind Jackie Jensen and Bob Turley after slashing .303/.405/.620, with his slugging percentage leading the major leagues. His 41 home runs trailed only Micky Mantle's 42 for most in the AL, and his 113 RBI were a close second as well.

Through the sixth inning on June 10, 1959, Colavito had hit 17 of the 42 home runs that would tie with fellow former

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#### PROUD SUPPORTERS OF INDIANS' BASEBALL

Indianapolis Indian Harmon Killebrew for the American League lead. Colavito hit .257 that year with 111 RBI in 154 games and was named to his first of six career All-Star games.

In the ninth inning he made history. The closest thing Baltimore had to a closer, Ernie Johnson, had entered the game in the eighth to finish it out. "I'll show you how to get this guy out," Colavito later learned Johnson had boasted.

Score, on the other hand, knew what Colavito was capable of even more than the slugger himself. As he sat on the dugout steps, Score turned to Colavito said, "Alright roomie, go up there and hit number four."

"Are you kidding?" Colavito recalls saying back. "I'll be happy if I get a single."

Colavito had gone 4-for-32 in his last eight games and was already 3-for-3 that night. When you're on you can hit anything, and when you're off they could throw it right down the middle. Colavito's numbers prior to that game suggested he was off.

Score swore at him and said, "Just go do it." Colavito wasn't about to argue.

Johnson went up and in for the first pitch, backing Colavito off the plate. Instead of looking down and away, like where his last two home run pitches had been, Colavito shrugged off any premonitions about what pitch would be thrown.

"I just looked for the ball," Colavito said. "He threw me a high fastball that was on the inner part of the plate, and I hit that one as hard as any of them."

The ball landed in the left field bleachers, and Colavito's name joined the seven before him to accomplish the feat.

Colavito was a .272 hitter through the end of the 1959 season with Cleveland. Prior to the 1960 season, he was sent to Detroit in exchange for the reigning AL batting



The slugger spent four years in Detroit. He led all major leaguers with 163 games played in 1961 and hit a career-high 45 home runs. He led the AL with 309 total bases in 1962 and 692 plate appearances in '63.

He spent one season with the Kansas City Athletics before returning to Cleveland in 1965, where he led the AL with 108 RBI and finished the season fifth in MVP voting.

The lifetime .266 hitter bounced from Cleveland to the Chicago White Sox to the Los Angeles Dodgers and finally ended his career less than two miles from where he grew up in the Crotona Park semipro league, with the New York Yankees.

He hit the final home run of his career in his hometown vs. Cleveland on Sept. 24, 1968. Four days later on the grass of the AL East rival where he made his debut 13 years prior, Colavito appeared in the final game of his career.

Now, the legend – not the curse – of Rocky Colavito lives in the record books and will forever be part of baseball history in Indianapolis. He was inducted into the Cleveland Indians Hall of Fame in 2006 for his career in the place he grew to love.

INDIANS IN THE COMMUNITY



STEAK HOUSE

#### INDIANS HONOR LOCAL NURSES THROUGH MEAL DONATION

#### by CHEYNE REITER

# Through the first 2 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> months of the coronavirus crisis, Indianapolis Indians Charities donated over 80,000 meals and \$32,500 to local nonprofits, including Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana, Shepherd Community Center and the American Red Cross of Indiana. Those donations provided immediate help to individuals and families most affected by COVID-19. And as the ongoing and evolving pandemic impacts our community, country and world daily, the everyday effort of frontline healthcare and essential workers to help Hoosiers push forward has not gone unnoticed.

Indianapolis Indians Charities is dedicated to creating partnerships that allow Central Indiana youth and families to grow stronger together, learn more and live healthier lives.

IIC's latest donation brought attention to frontline healthcare professionals, specifically nurses at Franciscan Health and Riley Children's Hospital, through a meal donation program initiated by Huse Culinary. For every \$12 donation made to Huse Culinary during National Nurses Week (May 6-12), one lunch meal from St. Elmo Steak House was donated to nurses entrenched in local hospitals during the pandemic. IIC promised to match the first 500 meals donated from the community.



"As nurses put their lives on the line during the COVID-19 pandemic, Indianapolis Indians Charities is proud to join the efforts of Huse Culinary by donating meals to local hospitals in advance of National Nurses Day," Indianapolis Indians President and General Manager Randy Lewandowski said in a Huse Culinary press release. "Our frontline healthcare professionals deserve recognition and praise in more ways than one, especially during these uncertain times, and we hope these meals provide a brief respite and show of appreciation for all of their determined and heroic efforts."



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VOLVO

*The best offensive year in Indians history came from the bat of Champ Summers, a major leaguer and Vietnam veteran* 

The Summer of



#### by MEGAN GARCIA

With a 4-1 loss in Game 5 of the 1978 American Association Championship, the Indians packed their bags and returned to Indianapolis with questions of what could have been. Owning home field advantage in the series, the league-leading 78-57 Indians mustered just one win in the best-of-seven set to the sub-.500 Omaha Royals. It was an unpleasant end, to say the least.

The Tribe's parent team in Cincinnati was weeks away from experiencing the similar fate of a hard-fought year ending abruptly. The major league season still had a handful of games on deck for September and the Reds were in a heated race in the National League West. With the season over for the Indians, Cincinnati dipped into its farmhands and selected Indianapolis' MVP to help push the team across the finish line.

The summer of 1978 belonged to John 'Champ' Summers, a 32-year-old with four years of major league experience who rightfully took home the team's top award after having the best offensive year in Indianapolis history.

He led the American Association with 170 hits, 34 home runs, 124 runs batted in and 307 total bases. The triple crown was almost his, but his .368 batting average was just three points behind the top spot. Summers had little to no weaknesses at the plate and was recognized for it.

"It was the best thing that happened to him," Voice of the Indians Howard Kellman said. "He was the Minor League Player of the Year and had six years in the majors after that. He didn't compare to another player. That was a remarkable season."

Physically, Summers stood out from the rest. His strength came from serving a tour in Vietnam before his baseball career. Even years after the army, he still lifted weights to keep his physique at peak performance. Weightlifting wasn't a favored workout by ballplayers back then, unlike in today's era of baseball. It was hard to find a player who looked anything like him.



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His strength and discipline from the service translated to power and consistency at the plate. His strikeout numbers were low and his batting average was high for a power hitter. He was the Indians' perfect hitter.

"It wasn't like he got off to a bad start in the season and picked it up down the road," Kellman said. "He was great the entire season. You can hit 34 home runs and have slumps, but to have his batting average, you have to be consistent all season long."

Summers narrowly missed opening the major league season with Cincinnati. He was the final player to be cut from the Reds spring training camp. Major League Baseball reduced rosters from 25 to 24 players that season, and he found himself on the corner of 16th Street and Harding Street at Bush Stadium in mid-April. The smaller roster resulted in being the best thing to happen for everyone involved.

His ability to drive the ball made him one of the most feared hitters in the league. Summers was only five long balls away from breaking Rocky Colavito's 1954 record of 38 home runs in a season, despite playing in 17 fewer games.

His knowledge of the strike zone, coupled with his plate discipline, made him a tough out for opposing teams. If he wasn't making contact, he was taking walks to first base because he knew how to work the count in his favor.

A three-game series against Wichita in early June showed just how dominant Summers could be at the plate. He went 7-for-12 while driving in eight runs with three home runs and a triple as the Tribe swept the series. The Indians were 11.5 games behind Evansville in the Eastern Division heading into the first game and had only chipped away at the deficit by half a game after the series sweep.

But after that early June series, the Indians started to close in on Evansville. Eventually that 11-game lead dwindled to 5.5 games in late June. Keeping them in the playoff hunt was the eventual MVP.

What made Summers the best player in Minor League Baseball was his presence in the game. When his bat connected with the ball, it was usually when the Indians had their backs against the wall.

Much of the '78 season was controlled by the Evansville Triplets in the Eastern Division. The Tribe were holding on to mathematical hope that would keep their playoff chances alive.

On Aug 30 vs. Springfield, a must-win game for the Tribe went back and forth. Springfield tied it in the ninth after Indy had held a 2-1 first-inning lead. The Indians then found themselves staring down the culmination of their season when, facing a 4-2 deficit in the 10th, the first two Tribe batters resulted in outs. Summers' hopes of coming to bat in the inning were dwindling. He retreated to the home clubhouse, removed his jersey and cracked open a beer.

But the Indians weren't done just yet. A single and two walks kept the inning alive for Summers to have an at-bat with the bases loaded. The possibilities were endless for the most important moment of the season. A single could tie it while a double potentially would win the game — it just depended on how hard Summers hit the ball and where. He was known for power at the plate, as well as having a lack of speed on the base paths.

He hit a triple off the right-field wall. All three runners scored to walk off the night with a 5-4 win. In the most important moment of the season, Summers came through.

The stakes of the game didn't faze him. His offensive numbers were game changers for the Indians. Their appearance in the American Association Championship doesn't happen without Summers having the best offensive year in Indians history.

In "Extra Innings: My Life in Baseball," a collection of stories covering the history of the Indianapolis Indians written by Chairman Emeritus Max Schumacher and author Mark Montieth, Summers had a positive outlook on his year in Indianapolis.

"It turned my whole life around."

in Indianapolis

Tit turned my whole lite around." Champ Summers on bis 1978 season

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