



## RUSS KEMMERER SHARES HIS MEMORIES

By Marc Allan

The next time you're grouching about free agency and the seemingly crazy relationship between baseball owners and players, remember the story Russ Kemmerer tells in his new self-published book, "Hey, Kid, Just Get It Over the Plate."

The year is 1966, over two full seasons after he had last played for the Houston Colt .45s. Kemmerer is doing color commentary for the Indianapolis Indians' television broadcasts and occasionally pitching batting practice. One day in June, Indians manager Les Moss calls Kemmerer and says the Indians' parent club, the Chicago White Sox, wants to sign him to a minor-league contract for the rest of the season, with the possibility of getting called to the majors

in September.

Kemmerer loves the idea – and the \$10,000 salary that goes with it. But a few days later, Moss calls him in and says Houston won't release him unless the White Sox give them two prospects.

"I had not heard from (Houston) in more than two years and I had not received a contract offer from them during this period," Kemmerer writes. "Still, they owned me and would until the day I died. I had no right to negotiate a baseball contract for myself that perhaps could give me one more opportunity to play at the major league level."

If Houston not offering Kemmerer a contract after 1963 didn't effectively end his career, demanding two players as compensation certainly did. The White Sox had wanted him, but not that badly.



Russ Kemmerer at Comiskey Park in 1960.

Kemmerer finished with a 43-59 lifetime record and a 4.46 ERA over nine



Ted Williams (left) and Kemmerer stand at the steps of the visitor's dugout prior to a game at Yankee Stadium in 1954.





seasons with Boston, Washington, Chicago (AL) and Houston. Those aren't the kind of numbers that normally merit a memoir, yet Kemmerer came away from baseball with any number of wonderful stories and accomplishments. He played with Ted Williams, struck out Mickey Mantle, got Stan Musial to hit into a double play, won both games of a doubleheader — and even surrendered Roger Maris' 15th and 39th home runs in 1961.

The stories behind those memorable moments — and more — are included in "Hey, Kid, Just Get it Over the Plate." The book is half career retrospective, half tribute to the "twinkling stars" who played ball during his era but never got the credit they deserved. The title comes from the first words Williams ever said to him.

About three years ago, Kemmerer and a bunch of ex-ballplayers were spending a morning together sharing memories when one of the players' wives said she wished she had a tape recorder there. "When you guys are gone," she said, "you'll take these great stories with you and they'll be gone forever."

That comment stuck with Kemmerer. "I wanted to leave something for my family and future generations of my family," he says, "something that would be enjoyable and let them know a little bit more about their grandfather."



**Russ Kemmerer** had a 43-59 record and 4.46 ERA in nine major league seasons.



**Kemmerer (right)** with former Red Sox shortstop **Johnny Pesky** in 2001.

For entertaining baseball stories and a chance to spend some time with a genial storyteller who played with or against Williams, Mantle, Mays, McCovey, Clemente and so many others, the book is a treat.

Kemmerer grew up in Pittsburgh and settled in Indiana when his playing days were over. In his 1954 major league debut, as a member of the Boston Red Sox, he pitched a one-hit shutout. His career ended in 1963 with his unceremonious release by the second-year Houston franchise.

The basement of his Northeastside Indianapolis home reflects those years. The walls are covered with baseball memorabilia — autographed photos, posters, framed articles, artwork, baseball cards.

"I have nine or 10 baseball cards, and one of them I don't even put out because I've only seen it once," he says. "In 1955, Topps put out what they called a double-header. The card folded over, and the legs and feet of the back person were the same as the feet of the front person on the card. I'm on the front, and you flip it and Monte Irvin's the back player on the card. To have a Hall-of-Famer on the same card is really something."

Baseball didn't make Kemmerer rich — his top salary was \$22,000 a year — but it provided him with plenty of stories. There's the one about the limburger

cheese in the catcher's mitt or the night he slipped a fish in future Hall of Famer Nellie Fox's bed. He roomed with the great Early Wynn and the unusual Jimmy Piersall, and made a positive impression as a rookie by following manager Lou Boudreau's order to hit a batter.

"Any SOB that can go out there and drill a man when he's told to has a place on this ballclub," he quotes Boudreau as saying.

Kemmerer's post-baseball career included coaching baseball at Indiana University for a couple of years while studying to become a Methodist pastor. From there, he taught English and coached high-school sports — football at Milan for a couple of years, baseball and football for 19 years at Lawrence Central High School.

Now 71 and pretty much retired, Kemmerer says he's looking forward to promoting "Hey Kid" and sharing his stories. As he writes toward the end: "It's not the thrills or highlights I cherish most — it's baseball, the game and the men I played with and against."

*When he's not writing for the Indians' program, Marc Allan spends his time covering television and radio for the Indianapolis Star and wondering whether it's possible for a 44-year-old left-hander who throws 40 mph to make The Show.*

*The book: To purchase "Hey Kid, Just Get It Over the Plate!" call 1-317-849-7264. The book costs \$21.15 (\$19.95 plus sales tax).*