

by MIKE LOPRESTI

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# Razor Comes Home

Clubhouse leader, fan favorite returning to his Circle City baseball roots

Having made one of the most important decisions of his life, Razor Shines was driving east on I-70, a baseball Don Quixote in search of a happy ending.

He would soon turn 30, with no job and a surgically repaired knee. That's the end of the road for a lot of guys. But home in Kansas, he had worked hours in the gym and on the basketball court in pickup games. The weight had come off, the body had hardened, and the knee had held up.

Yearning for one more chance, he knew just where to go. It was July 1986, and Razor and Leann Shines were headed for Indianapolis. He had enjoyed a great season for the Indians in 1984, and another good one for part of 1985 before the Montreal Expos called him up for the brief and wonderful interlude that went dark in Shea Stadium. It was there that Shines, pinch running, hurt his knee sliding into second base against the Mets in the fourth inning on the last day of the season. That wrecked knee helped get him released.

But Indy had been a joy ride. Yeah, that was the place to try, for a man going all-in.

"My wife and I talked about it, and I said 'let's do it.' We packed it up and we took off," Shines would say more than three decades later. "The only thing that was going through my head was I had gotten myself in the best baseball shape I could be in, I was ready to try to play again, and I wanted to start at a place where I'd had the most success along my way."

Let's bring in Bruce Schumacher, now the Indians CEO, then working under dad

Max with the club. "Razor shows up at Bush Stadium – it might have been July 4 – because Dad had always been a proponent of his. He was as svelte as I've ever seen him. He obviously had been working out a lot. He said 'Max, do you think the Expos will sign me now?'"

There were no spots on the Indians active roster, but Max Schumacher got the Expos to hire Shines as an Indy bullpen catcher, his former position before he moved to first. He got to pinch hit in late July at Iowa and doubled in a go-ahead run. The next night, catcher Randy Hunt got hurt, and guess who was the next man up?

"I had to catch basically on one knee, and I got down there and did it," Shines said. "And the second part of my Indianapolis career took off."

Boy, did it ever. He had another big seventh-inning, two-run single that put Indianapolis ahead the following day. He and the Indians were on their way. They were 50-49 without Shines on the active roster, 4½ games behind in third place. They went 30-13 with an active Razor and won the division by nine games. By the time he was finished, he produced 68 home runs and 404 RBI in his Indianapolis career, led by 18 home runs and 80 RBI in his torrid summer of 1984.

Razor Shines is returning to Victory Field this month for an appearance at the final two home games of the season. Elvis is back in the building. Maybe he can finally get a look at Suite 355, the Razor Shines Suite, between the Larry Walker and Dave Concepcion rooms. Or the historical timeline that adorns the suite-level wall

on the first base side, where photos show him being hoisted by fans on the field following the '86 American Association championship clincher and the clubhouse celebration that followed with Max Schumacher.

## No. 3, the first baseman... RRRRRRAZOR SHINES!

You see this minor league fairy tale every so often: A man stays around long enough and is taken to heart so much by the masses, he becomes an icon. That's normally for further up the baseball food chain, in the bright lights of the big leagues. But when it happens in the more intimate confines of the minors, the bond between player and public can be truly special. It happened here, over a remarkable era that began in 1984 and ended with Razor Shines Day in his last game in 1993. During that span -- which included another quick cup of Montreal coffee -- the Indians won four consecutive American Association championships and Shines played in more than 800 games, signed a gazillion autographs, shook a gazillion hands, and made Indianapolis his home.

"He's the most popular player in the history of the franchise," said long-time voice of the Indians Howard Kellman.

But how? And why?

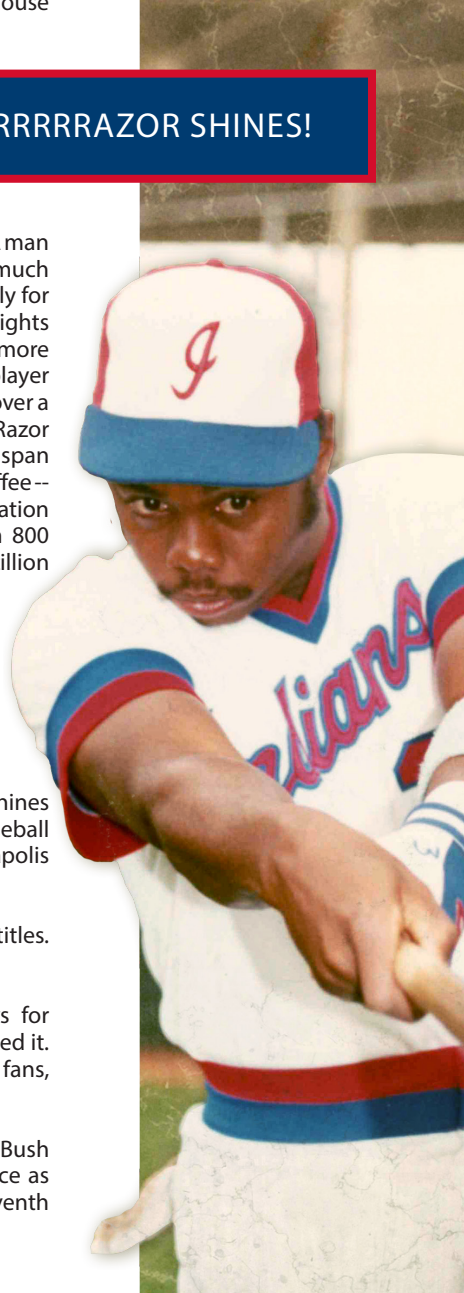
"I'll start right at the top with Max Schumacher," Shines said. "He is, to this day, the No. 1 reason why my baseball career ended up the way it did. He made Indianapolis home for me. His family is in a sense my family.

"We won a lot of baseball games. We won a lot of titles. People love winners. I was a part of that."

Bruce Schumacher: "You don't have many guys for that long, so any box you want to check, he checked it. Amazing name, memorable PA call, good with fans, clutch hitter, good player."

If Shines listens a moment, he can still hear the Bush Stadium announcer, with the sound that was once as beloved a part of an Indians summer as the seventh inning stretch.

No. 3, the first baseman . . . Rrrrrrazor Shines!





Kellman: "Kurt Hunt was the PA announcer. One night, Hunt said, 'now batting Rrrrrrazor Shines.' So Razor lines the ball into the gap for a double. The crowd gets excited, Kurt does it again, he gets another hit next time up, and it just took off from there."

Shines: "I wanted to step out of the batter's box the first time I heard it. It startled me a little bit. But I heard it the next time up, and then I appreciated it more and more every time that I heard it. I can't tell you how that made me feel when I walked to the plate. It made me feel that I was going to succeed every time. And I know it put pressure on the opposing pitchers."

When Hunt left, Bruce Schumacher took over the microphone and continued the tradition. The fans loved it. When they saw Razor around town, it was their greeting of choice, and fed the aura that was steadily growing in Indianapolis.

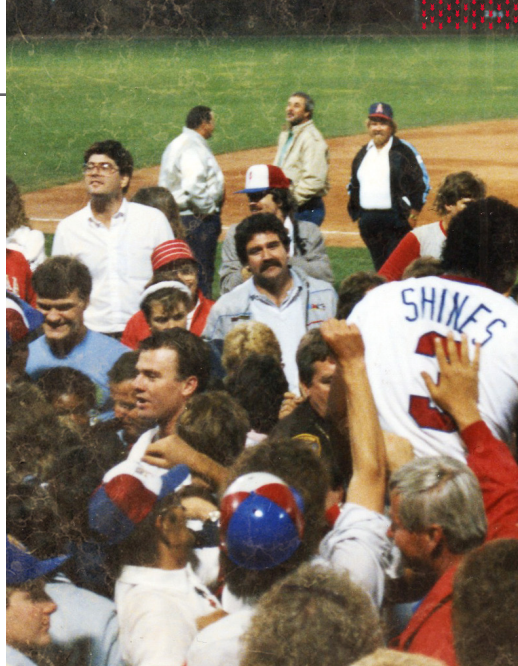
"I heard it everywhere I went. And I loved it. All I could do is smile and shake a hand and sign an autograph. I could be in autograph sessions with Indiana Pacers and have bigger lines than those guys, and they would go like, 'who was that?'"

The Colts had just come to town and were struggling to find their competitive footing. The Pacers were losing in the pre-Reggie Miller days.

"You talk about 1986, '87, he's the most popular athlete in Indianapolis," Kellman said.

Maybe it was a little bit of a strange love affair. But then, most of the love affairs in his life have not been ordinary.

Start with baseball itself, growing up in a less-than-posh neighborhood in Durham, North Carolina, only five miles from Duke. "It was the other side of the world, five miles away. I remember telling my mom when I was 10 years old that I was going to play professional baseball. And people would look at me like, yeah right. A kid growing



up in the projects talking about he's going to play professional baseball."

The day came when he was drafted by the Expos, and when the scout arrived at his home with a contract, the conversation went something like this:

Shines: "Sir, I'm ready to go now. I don't care. I just want to go play."

Scout: "Well, this is going to be easy."

Shines: "Yes sir, it is. Where do I sign?"

He signed for \$1,000 and headed for the minors, where so many memories awaited. Such as the day he threw out notedspeedster Vince Coleman trying to steal twice in the same game. This was before he moved from catcher to the infield.

Or take the love affair with his wife. Razor met her diving into the stands after a foul ball in Wichita. There's a matrimonial story you don't hear every day.

"She was sitting there with her sister and her father and I dove to get a foul ball and knocked a cold cola over in her dad's lap. I felt so bad about it. I gave him a new ball



"You talk about 1986, '87, he's the most popular athlete in Indianapolis."

- Howard Kellman

that was an emotional moment which to this day is hard for me to talk about."

He and Leann lived here for 12 years, moving from apartment to apartment before buying a home on the north side. He worked other jobs during the winter. "I drove an oil truck just to help make ends meet. And it was cold, but it was something that had to be done."

In the late 1990s, Leann's work took the Shines to Austin, Texas. "A tough, tough move," Razor said. They are still there. After retiring as a player, Shines spent nearly two decades managing or coaching at every level, from Bishop Chatard High School to first base in the big leagues, with lots of stations in between. He says now he has gotten used to retirement, and even turned down a recent offer to manage a team in Mexico. But those back here who shared those Indianapolis days keep their Razor stories.

Indians vice president Cal Bureson, on the time imposing fireballer Randy Johnson had to pitch two simulated games while rehabbing and needed a batter: "Who wants to step in the batting cage with Randy Johnson in a simulated game after he's come back from a broken hand? The only guy we could get to do it was Razor. I remember him getting into the cage like he was getting in with a grizzly bear."

Said Shines, "I feared no one, not in the batter's box. I just wanted to make sure he got his work in and I got my work in, too."

For the second simulation, Bruce Schumacher got the Children's Museum to lend the Indians a mannequin to put in the box. He promised to return it in good shape. Johnson put two holes in it. But better than two holes in Razor.

Kim Rogers, who covered the team for the

and after the game he waited for me to sign it. First time I met his daughter. We went out to dinner, and we've been married now for 36 years."

And then, there was the love affair with Indianapolis. His first impression when he visited? "Cold."

His first look at Bush Stadium came with snow covering it. But he said the place grew on him and soon became home.

Never was that clearer than 1993, Razor Shines Day at Bush Stadium. The Indians presented him a Chevrolet Lumina. How often do you see that in Triple-A?

"Obviously it went to her," he said of his wife.

Razor Shines Day gave the man himself the chance to say thanks to so many that still makes it his most unforgettable moment in Indianapolis.

"I saved thanking my mother for last, because she had been there with me ever since I was a kid. There were times we didn't have sneakers to put on my feet. But there were always a new pair of baseball cleats. I didn't know how to thank her and

Indianapolis News: "He was a big kid, in a positive way. Great personality, a feisty competitor, quick to smile, quick to laugh. Nobody liked to celebrate a win more. If you played against him, you hated his guts. I know opponents would cuss him under their breath."

Shines on that: "I was about the clubhouse I was in, my teammates, and I could not care less what the opposing dugout thought about me. If you messed with anybody in our clubhouse, you had to answer to me. That's just the way it was. My clubhouse knew it, my teammates knew it, and the opposing dugout knew it."

Matter of fact, Burleson mentioned the time Shines came to Victory Field in 2006 as the Charlotte manager: "One thing hadn't changed. The guys in the Charlotte clubhouse liked him, everyone in the Indians clubhouse couldn't stand him." The Indy fans chanted his name anyway.

Kellman remembers Shines as a clutch hitter who lived for big moments and can still see him banging his bat on the plate in rage after he was intentionally walked in the ninth inning of game 7 of the 1986 playoffs. Billy Moore's two-run walk-off single eventually beat Denver.

Shines: "I felt like at that time, this is my team. We're going to win this. And if we don't win this, I want to be the reason we don't. I didn't want to put any pressure on anybody else. Next thing I know, Rob Dibble is on the mound and they're walking me intentionally. For a moment I snapped.

I busted my bat on home plate, so I had to go get another bat just to take my intentional walk."

Schumacher, about taking Shines to off-season pickup basketball games. "We've run up the court maybe two or three times, the score's like 2 to 1, and he's talking to

some kid on our team. He goes, 'You keep going to the basket. He can't guard you, and not only that, he knows he can't guard you.' I'm like, he doesn't even know these guys. But you were on his team, so you were better than anybody else. That was the way he looked at competition."

It was that package of gall and grit and smiles and joy and championships that made him Indy's adopted son.

"For us to win all those championships, with all the turnover there is in the minor leagues, he was the one constant," Kellman said.

Any keepsakes from those years?

"Yes," Shines said. "Friendships. Lifelong friendships."

Bruce Schumacher remembers what he said over the microphone that final game in 1993.

Leaving the field for the last time, Razor Shines.

No Rrrrrrazor was necessary, the name stood tall enough in Indianapolis. Still does.

