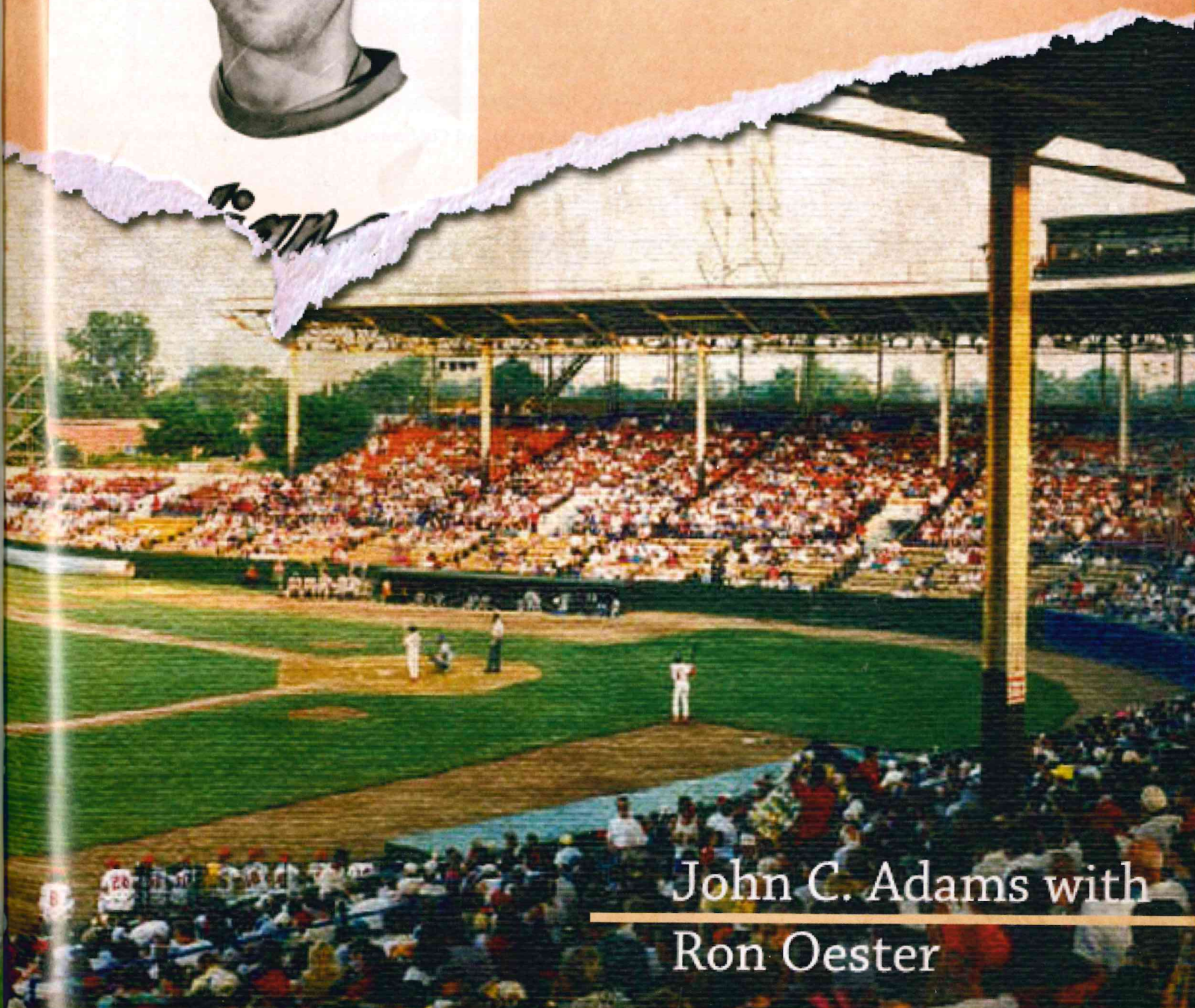
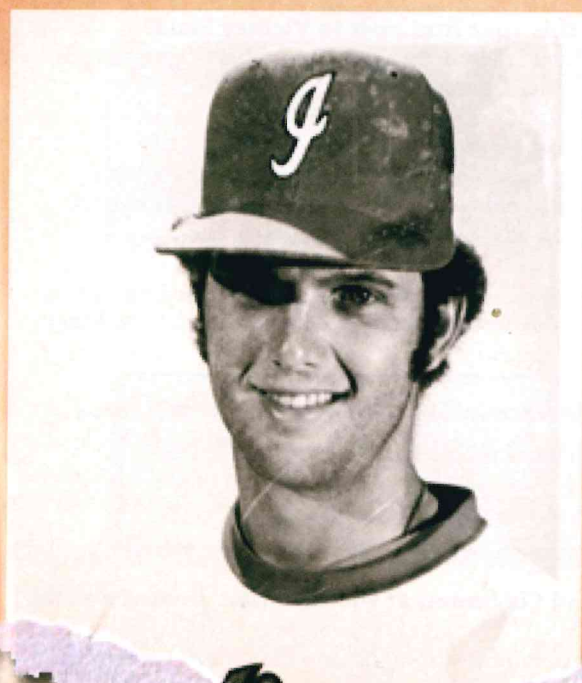


STILL IN THE

Game



John C. Adams with
Ron Oester

For three seasons in the late 1970's, Ron Oester patrolled the middle-infield for the Indianapolis Indians and led the team in games played and at-bats. Oester went on to have a successful 11-year career as a second-baseman for the Cincinnati Reds, including a World Series title over the popular and highly-favored Oakland A's in 1990. What does Oester recall about his stint with the Indianapolis and what is he up to now? He was back in Indianapolis this winter and sat down to recall his time with the Tribe, the Reds and his life today.

Q: It's been a while since you've been back to Indianapolis. Is this your first visit to Victory Field?

Oester: Yes, when I drove up it was amazing. I played three years at Bush Stadium and just seeing this (Victory Field) from the outside is unbelievable. I've been back to Indianapolis but not here before, no.

Q: Go back to '77 when you walked into Bush Stadium for the first time.

Oester: I liked Bush Stadium. Back then they didn't have near the ballparks they do now. It was an older stadium and it reminded you a bit of Tigers Stadium and Wrigley Field a little bit, I enjoyed playing there, and I really liked it because the grass was high and it gave me a lot more range at shortstop and it slowed the balls down.

Q: Did you play mainly shortstop during your time here?

Oester: All shortstop, and moved to second base (with the Reds) when Joe Morgan went free-agency in 1980 and they moved me.

Q: When you think back on your time playing for the Indians, what stands out the most?

Probably what stands out the most, I think it was the great teams I played on. We had great teams – Steve Henderson, Dan Norman, Mike LaCoss, Mario Soto – we had a lot of guys who went on to play in the big leagues. I just had some great years here, had a lot of fun and made a lot of good friends.

Q: There was such a pipeline of talent between Indianapolis and Cincinnati at the time that created a rabid fan base.

Oester: Yeah, right. It was a perfect setup – only an hour and forty-five minutes from Cincinnati. I know my family came over a lot to see me play and it was a good situation for me personally.

Q: With your home only two hours from Indianapolis, did you feel the support worthy of the "home-grown" guy?

Oester: Oh yeah, my family was here, my siblings would come, my fiancé came to see me, it was perfect. They were up here almost every weekend we were home so I was leaving lots of tickets.

Q: You lead the Indians in games played and at-bats in each of your three years in Indianapolis. Was that affirming to you as a ballplayer or frustrating that you were here three years before being called up to Cincinnati?

Oester: No, it wasn't frustrating at all because (at the big leagues) they had Dave Concepcion at shortstop, Joe Morgan at second base and I was here to get at-bats and waiting for something to open up. When Joe Morgan decided to go free-agency, it opened up a position in the infield and they moved me but I wasn't frustrated at all. In fact, if they (the Reds) would have kept Sparky (Anderson) as manager in 1979, he said he would take me with him. Probably the best thing that happened to me was that I didn't, stayed here and got my 500 at-bats.

Q: Who were you close with on the Indians teams during your time here?

Oester: Mike Grace, our third-baseman, we were pretty close, and Dan Dumoulin, who was the best-man at my wedding – he was a starting pitcher and relieved a little bit for the Reds and was from Kokomo, IN and we were real good friends. In fact, in Double-A ball up in Canada I lived with Dan and his wife and his two kids. He was probably my closest friend on the team. Steve Henderson, Danny Norman – I roomed with them in the instructional league.

Q: Were you a close team in terms of friendship?

Oester: I think the whole team was close. We did things together because we all moved up together from rookie ball – there were probably nine or 10 of us here in Indianapolis at the Triple-A level that played together in rookie ball. We were able to stay together and build those friendships.

Q: Do you still stay in touch?

Oester: Yeah, I talk to them now and then. We fade apart and lose each other's number so it's hard to stay in touch but I still see some of the guys.

Q: You weren't a big home run hitter (12 in three years), nor were you the run producer in the lineup. What did you see as your role here as an Indian?

Oester: I think my role was to get on base. I drove in some runs but I wasn't a big RBI guy, and I was a doubles hitter and was a real good base runner. I could go from first to third better than anyone. I knew how to play the game.

I was fundamentally sound and I knew when to take the extra base, so I think I was a solid player that way. I wasn't the type of player who stuck out in good lineup – I didn't even know I hit that many homeruns here!

Q: Any thoughts about going to another organization at the time?

Oester: Not at all. I was born and raised in Cincinnati and I just wanted to play for the Reds. I just had to wait for my time. It's just one of those things that I might have been up year earlier but I would have to produce off the bench.

Q: So as a 10-year-old kid from Cincinnati, playing for the Reds was the dream?

Oester: All I wanted to do was play in the big leagues and when the Reds drafted me it was just icing on the cake.

Q: What do you remember about your first call-up to the Reds?

Oester: I remember my parents were here and Roy Majtyka was the manager at the time and he called me in and told me, and Max Schumacher was with my dad. Max had known but he didn't say anything and I went out and told my dad. The biggest memory I probably have is my dad getting emotional.

Q: Tell us about your first at-bat at the major league level?

Oester: I was nervous as heck. I remember it was off of Phil Niekro and I hit a ground ball up the middle and they threw me out. My second at-bat I faced him again and got a base hit. It's something you never forget.

Q: You weren't a fan of batting gloves and never wore them.

Oester: I never did. I just liked to feel the bat, and (gloves) felt like they weighed my hands down. There's only a few of us who didn't wear them. A lot of coaches wear them because they hit so many (practice fly balls) but I can't because it just feels like there's something on my hands that's not natural.

Q: Eleven years with the same Major League club during your career is a long time. How has that changed today?

Oester: Free-agency for one. I had a chance to go free-agency in '87, the year I hurt my knee. The Los Angeles Dodgers wanted me – they offered me a half-million dollars more I was making with the Reds but I wanted to stay with the Reds. It's really seldom now you'll see a guy play his whole career with the same team.

Q: You played for the Reds in the World Series against Oakland in 1990. How did you beat an A's team that was so loaded with talent and were the odds-on favorite that year?

Oester: I think everyone felt it but us. We were definitely underdogs but got hot at the right time and, as they say, good pitching beats good hitting. They had an unbelievable team but we just did the right things and had the pitching.

Q: Where's your World Series ring?

Oester: It doesn't fit anymore. I wore it out once in a while but I can't get in on anymore. It still looks good but I've gotta get it re-sized.

Q: How was your overall health as a player in the big leagues?

Oester: I've dislocated a finger and had muscles torn in my shoulders and I was always able to play until my knee was taken out in a double-play (during a July 5, 1987 collision with New York Met Mookie Wilson). That was my biggest thing. I was out a whole year from July of '87 'til July of '88 with my knee, but I was pretty lucky other than that.

Q: What about as an Indian?

Oester: Howard (Kellman, longtime Indians radio announcer) told me a while back that I played in every game but one in my three years here. The one I didn't play in – I remember that – was when I got my wisdom teeth pulled and we had a double-header. I missed the first game and played the second game.

Q: How do you spend your time these days?

Oester: I've got 80 acres at home I'm just doing a lot of stuff around the house. I help a landscaper when he needs help and do a lot of odd jobs and home and do some speaking engagements, but I'm looking to get back into baseball. I just wanted to come home – I've been with the White Sox the last two years as an infield instructor in the minor leagues but I just felt like was time to come home. I'm a grandfather now - I just had a granddaughter a month ago so I want to spend time with them. I thought it was time to come home, but I'm talking with the Reds and hopefully we can work something out. I'm comfortable with (the organization) and want to get back home again.

Q: Working with the young guys and the salaries as they potentially can be, what do you think motivates them today?

Oester: Everybody I've worked with, what motivates them is trying to get to the big leagues. They love the game, they want discipline, they want instruction and they want to get better. I think that's what motivates them. They've seen the money that can be made in the big leagues now and they want to get there.