

Averill Shy, Except at the Plate

BROEG & BASEBALL



ST. LOUIS—Until the Veterans' Committee recently voted **Earl Averill** into the baseball Hall of Fame, the short, stocky son of Snohomish, Wash., probably had been best known as the hitter who ruined Dizzy Dean's career. **Earl** did it with a shot through the pitcher's box in the 1937 All-Star Game.

The point is that, though he had the self-assurance necessary to be a good hitter, **Averill** was a rather shy, retiring man. He avoided the limelight almost as much as his old club, the Cleveland Indians.

TWO YEARS AGO, he left his bucolic hometown in the verdant valley of the Snohomish River to return East, first for a reunion of the 1933 All-Stars in St. Louis and then on to the 1973 All-Star Game at Kansas City.

Studying the man, pink-cheeked at 70, I thought he was considerably smaller than I had recalled him in his 11-season American League career. And he swung a big bat.

"Forty-two ounces usually," he said, "and 36 inches long, but now and then I'd go up to 44 ounces."

Joe Cronin nodded. "And that's why he'd hit so many smashes right up the middle."

AVERILL dissented, but only mildly. Although he hit more than 30 homers three times, he said he swung for hits, not for the long ball. "And to keep my eye on the ball, I always aimed for the pitcher's cap, trying to go up the middle."

Which was exactly what he did in the 1937 All-Star Game at Washington's Griffith Stadium, where he crunched one off Dizzy Dean's left foot, fracturing the big toe of the colorful character, then in his

prime. Diz tried unwisely to pitch again too soon and threw unnaturally, permanently injuring his resilient right arm.

O! Diz, despite his full follow-through to get the most mustard on the ball, was a nimble fellow—a fifth infielder, they called him—but he couldn't escape the lash of the lefthanded-hitting **Averill**.

"**JUST BEFORE** the All-Star Game, I literally knocked Buck Newsom off the hill with another line drive," recalled the 5-9½, 172-pound **Averill**, whose own career was shortened by back trouble that began in 1937.

By then, the **Earl** of Snohomish had come off a savage .378 season, his highest for average, but not his most productive in home runs (28) or RBIs (126). Back in 1931, his third full season of a career in which he hit .319, **Averill** batted .333 with 143 runs batted in and 32 homers, the same total he belted the following year.

From that back misery, however, came a decline in power and production. This durable player had been delayed in reaching the majors. Though he hit spectacularly for San Francisco in the Pacific Coast League in both 1926 and '27, the Seals wouldn't sell him to a big league club. So **Averill** was approaching 27 when Cleveland purchased him for \$50,000 after a 1928 season in which he combed PCL pitchers for 270 hits in 169 games, batting .354.

AVERILL BROKE in with the Indians by hitting .330 in 1929. He was outstanding through a decade with the Tribe, but got into his only World Series as a part-time player with Detroit in 1940. He was named with Tris Speaker and Shoeless

Joe Jackson to Cleveland's all-time outfielder in 1969, when baseball celebrated its big league centennial with the selection of franchise all-star teams.

Back in 1938, John B. Foster, veteran editor of the Spalding Guide, went one better when he named **Averill** to his No. 2 all-time outfield. Foster named Wee Willie Keeler, **Averill** and Fred Clarke as his personal threesome behind only Babe Ruth, Tris Speaker and Ty Cobb.

If you wouldn't go that far in praising Howard **Earl Averill**, it's probably enough that he finished ahead of Charley Jamieson, Joe Vosmik, Homer Summa, Bibb Falk, Dale Mitchell, Elmer Flick



Earl Averill

and Jeff Heath in a poll to select Cleveland's best-hitting outfielders.

AND FOR THE muscular Heath and bespectacled **Earl** Torgeson, another son of Snohomish who had campaigned for **Averill's** election, it must be considerable satisfaction that **Averill** will be inducted at Cooperstown August 18, along with Ralph Kiner, Billy Herman, Bucky Harris and Judy Johnson.

Beautiful Snohomish, where for years **Averill** operated a small motel when it didn't interfere with his fishing, has only a few thousand population. But the state of Washington should be well-represented, if only by the Averills. **Earl, Jr.**, you know, was a big league catcher and handyman with four clubs from 1956 to 1963.

After the Veterans' Committee meeting at which **Averill** was elected, Cronin recalled that the Cleveland star, whose 2,020 hits included 767 for extra bases, had doubled and tripled in the 1934 All-Star Game at New York's Polo Grounds.

"**I REMEMBER** that one so well," said Cronin, "not only because I was managing the American League club, but because we'd looked so feeble against Carl Hubbell and then still won it, 9-7."

Averill was called The Rock, a nickname he inherited at Cleveland when he held a firecracker too long and wound up burned, one of the few times he ever was out of the lineup until his back began to act up. Several years ago, he underwent back surgery.

A good outfielder and good runner with a strong arm, enabling him to play deep in center field, **Averill** crowded the plate. Though

he could go to left field with outside pitches, he tried to pull to take advantage of the short right field at League Park.

FACT IS, the **Earl** of Snohomish homered off a good lefthander, Detroit's **Earl** Whitehill, his first time at bat in the majors. **Earl** also hit four homers and a double in a doubleheader in September, 1930.

"What galled me," **Averill** recalled, "was that I hit another one out of there, which would have been four in one game, but in those days they called it where the umpire last saw it and not where it left the playing field. The umpire said he'd seen it curve foul outside the park."

It's one thing to be charged with a foul ball on what could have been a home run. It's even worse to be thrown out on one that went the distance. That was an experience **Earl Averill** encountered before coming up to Cleveland to be selected by baseball writers to THE SPORTING NEWS' major league All-Star team in 1931-32-34-36.

AT SEATTLE in 1926, his first season with the Seals, **Averill** teed off on Jumbo Jim Elliott with teammate Eddie Mulligan on base. Then, as he saw the ball going over the fence, **Earl** dog-trotted—into a double play.

"That's right," insisted the **Earl** of Snohomish. "Seems there had been another ball lying in the outfield and a guy named Fuzzy Hufft of Seattle picked it up, threw it in and they tagged out both Mulligan and me. The umpires allowed it, no matter how much we argued, and we lost the game, 1-0."

Somebody should have been called The Rock that day. Better still, The Boulder.

Furman Bisher



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has been written. I saw it in a cartoon once, a glimmer of it at least. It was a Willard Mullin, the Stuart of sporting artists. First day of spring training, players bounding lamb-like through the open clubhouse door out to the field. Old trainer—I'd guess Doc Jorgenson, who used to be with the Pirates—standing to the side, a look of wisdom spreading across his face as he hummed, "Welcome, sweet springtime..." and a bottle of liniment in one hand. Well, liniment used to be big in the aches and pains of muscle games.

MAINLY, THE depiction isn't easy because spring training is something different to everybody. Depending on age, position, the season before, if you're owner, manager, coach, equipment man, umpire, reporter, columnist just passing through, broadcaster and on into the myriad of miscellaneous categories.

For some, it's like a bud of a blossom trying to break into full bloom.

For some, it's a last gasp.

For some, it's a body renewal project.

For some, it's the Lenten season in double-knit and spikes.

For some, it's a sore arm, a bro-

ken leg or a beanball.

For some, it's a hotel or motel or barracks.

For some, it's the Pirates' Cove, or the Barbary Coast, or Russ' Bar—all depending on one's choice of poison.

FOR SOME, IT'S too much sun, days of golf, dinners that begin with several drinks and run long into the evening, and mornings that follow with a brown taste and dull eyes.

For some, it's a ritual reluctantly surrendered.

There was the spring an old outfielder checked in with the rest of the troops at a hotel in West Palm Beach. A little later, he was across the street meeting a bus bringing in an old girl friend. I watched him with absorbed interest during workouts. His actions were without enthusiasm. Pacing themselves, they call it.

A week later, still in virtually the same unathletic condition in which he'd arrived, the old outfielder left. Turned in his uniform. Said it was over. Caught the bus home himself. I don't know where the girl went. He hadn't come for baseball. He'd come for one more spring, one more ride on the carousel. He's probably back some place in Pennsylvania selling cars, manufactur-

ing braces for cripples, running a filling station or delivering mail now, but always, each spring, feeling the familiar twinges of the season, as an old football player's bad knee reminds him it's about to rain again.

SPRING WAS meant for baseball. All the major sports have their pre-season convocations and reformations. With ice hockey, it's indoors and cold. With basketball, it's indoors and rancid odors, all traceable to sweat. With football, it's outdoors and the sun shines, but too much, and it's hot and all is physical, man on man, and nothing about the process is relaxed. It was already hot, for it is summer, and it only adds hot to hot.

But baseball plays heavily on the change of seasons. One moves from the ice-and-chill factor and fur-lined wraps to the sun and short sleeves and balmy hours of warming sunshine. One freshly removed from snowy northern climes to Florida and spiked and suited up can almost feel the body thawing out.

There is no faultless system for rating spring training camps. That is, which has the most of the best, and where is spring spent most pleasantly with what baseball team? Sometimes it's the park. Sometimes it's the eating places

around the town. Sometimes it's where the girls are. Or how long the trips, such as the drive across state from Vero Beach to Tampa, and how you travel.

I SAY IT'S THE hotel. Hotels in Florida have been made famous, or otherwise, as spring training headquarters. Some, if not all, are good, but shall never be scratched from the memory of those who made one of their rooms a home for one-twelfth of a year. The Cardinals were the one link an old trackside hotel in St. Petersburg had with notoriety, the Bainbridge. The Angebilt was widely known around Orlando as the home of the old Washington Senators. The Tigers chose the New Florida in Lakeland, which had in its favor proximity to a social club that served cocktails on Sunday while all other bottles were corked.

Cincinnati was famous for the Floridian in Tampa, or vice versa, and the Tampa Terrace was known as the place where Dizzy Dean slugged a sportswriter, as well as the address of the White Sox. In Bradenton, it was the Manatee River, in Sarasota the John Ringling, in Clearwater the Fort Harrison, and the Yankees made the Cards jealous by their choice of the Soreno across town in St. Pete. It always was a badge of vanity to



Dizzy Dean

walk in the next spring and have the desk clerk say, "Why, hello, Mr. Remington, how nice to have you again," as if spring training never had been anywhere but around the corner.



Averill Out of Line With Blast

ST. LOUIS—Maybe it came as a shock because Hall of Famers customarily are completely grateful for election, especially the old-timers. In addition, Earl Averill also had seemed such a shy, retiring man.

Instead, however, immediately after induction at Cooperstown, N. Y., 34 years after he'd played his last big league game, the 73-year-old Averill blasted his own "late" election. He also criticized electors for their failure to name other players Averill deems worthy.

The Earl of Snohomish had more assistance in his written protest, handed out to the press at Cooperstown, than he ever needed with a bat in his hands in the 10-plus seasons he played at Cleveland.

REPORTEDLY, the sour statement was prepared by John K. Eichmann, who with Steve Mitchell and others edited for a time an interesting Seattle-based publication called Sports Scoop.

They say Averill footed a bill of several thousand dollars to transport to Cooperstown those who had supported him in Sports Scoop as well as relatives proud of the good-looking 73-year-old man.

Only a narrow-minded pinhead would resent suggestions from anyone who has ideas about the candidacy of any player.

BUT TO IMPLY that an Eichmann or any other individual can do more than point out the strength of a candidate would be an insult to the integrity if not com-

petence of the electorate.

As one who votes in both the Veterans Committee poll and the baseball writers' election, I must say that the most expensive presentation I've ever seen on behalf of a Hall of Fame candidate failed to bring about his induction. That was the case of Smoky Joe Wood, the flame-throwing Boston Red Sox pitcher who had a fabulous 34-5 record in 1912, hurt his arm and then became a pretty good hitting outfielder at Cleveland.

Wood's career, covering all or parts of 14 seasons in the majors, actually was longer than Averill's. And a point in both cases is that Averill's back injury after a banner 1936 season shortened Earl's career almost as much as the arm ailment reduced Wood's efficiency.

INJURY, LIKE death, can take its toll of a man's chances to make the Hall of Fame. Is there any doubt that Addie Joss would not have been elected if this Cleveland pitching star hadn't died when he was 31?

Additionally, Averill doubtlessly was held back longer than necessary in reaching the majors. He batted .348, .324 and .354 for the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League before he was sold to Cleveland after the 1928 season for a reported \$50,000.

But it's a fact, too, that the Earl of Snohomish came up at a propitious time for a hitter. Batters had their heyday with a juiced-up ball

in 1929 and 1930, in particular, and again in the American League in '36. That was the season the little lefthanded-hitting Averill finished second to Luke Appling in the batting race and third to Lou Gehrig and Appling in the A. L. Most Valuable Player poll.

IN 1929, when three National League clubs batted over .300, the N. L. had a league average of .294. Lefty O'Doul led with .398, and 58 players batted .300 or higher.

In the American League in '29, Averill's rookie year, he batted .339, and 50 players hit .300 or better.

A year later, when Bill Terry hit .401 in the National League, the league-wide N. L. average was .303. That same year, Averill hit .339 in the A. L., where the Indians hit a healthy .304 as a club—yet trailed the Yankees, who batted .309—and did NOT win the pennant.

Even in Averill's top season, 1936, the American League batted a robust .289 and the Indians led with .304, a result in part, no doubt, of Cleveland playing some home games in League Park, with its short right field.

Forty-six A. L. hitters batted .300 or better that year, and the Yankees must have had plenty of artillery because they scored a record 1,065 runs, winning the pennant.

CLEVELAND finished fifth and, of course, that didn't help Averill's cause, but, I submit, neither did the batting era in which Earl was quiet except when at bat.

I'm not trying to deprecate the talent of Averill... a .318 lifetime hitter... who was a good outfielder defensively, too. I'm merely trying to understand a situation that would lead Averill to announce crabbily at Cooperstown that if he had not lived to receive the Hall of Fame honor, he had instructed his family not to accept it posthumously.

For Averill's information—if a man is elected to the Hall of Fame, dead or alive, he's in. Period.

Generously, Averill tried to make a case for a few other players he considers deserving of election to the Hall of Fame. But to keep it reasonably selective, not every Tom, Dick or Earl can be chosen. It's not a case of the more the merrier, no matter how sentimental or mellow the old baseball player or fan.

FOR AVERILL'S information, I've got to point out that Earl just didn't impress voters sufficiently back in his day (1929-41).

For instance, he didn't get his first BBWAA vote until 1949, and then he got just one. Ahead of him in order then, and still not in the Hall of Fame, were:

Tony Lazzeri, Pepper Martin, Hank Gowdy, Charley Grimm, Chuck Klein, Stuffy McInnis, Jimmy Dykes, Billy Southworth, Travis Jackson, Steve O'Neill, Jimmy Wilson, Babe Adams, Babe Herman, Wilbur Cooper, Stan Hack, Mel Harder. Lefty O'Doul, Joe Dugan, George Earnshaw,

Fred Fitzsimmons, Charley Gelbert, Bill Jurges, Red Lucas, Ed Rommel, Urban Shocker, Lon Warneke and Cy Williams.

GETTING ONE vote each, like Averill, were Ossie Bluege, Ping Bodie, George Burns, Ben Chapman, Spud Davis, Leo Durocher, Howard Ehmke, Wes Ferrell, Art Fletcher, Joe Judge, Dick Kerr, Fred Lindstrom, Al Lopez, Buddy Myer, Art Nehf, Roger Peckinpaugh, Hub Prueitt, Jimmy Ring, Charley Root, George Selkirk, Bill Sherdel, Fred Toney, Bill Werber, Whitey Witt and Glenn Wright.

By the time Averill reached his peak votes—14 in the BBWAA election of 1958—those ahead of him and still not enshrined in Cooperstown were, in order:

Hack Wilson, Lazzeri, Martin, Gowdy, Klein, Johnny Vander Meer, Lopez, Bucky Walters, Durocher, O'Doul, Grimm, Dykes, Bobby Doerr, Nick Altrock, Southworth, Fitzsimmons, Paul Derringer and Adolfo Luque.

OBVIOUSLY, all do not merit Hall of Fame election and most won't make it. But even though they called Earl Averill the Rock after he held a firecracker too long at Cleveland and was burned, the former Indians' star must be smart enough to recognize an honor when he receives one.

Particularly when so many of his peers are like kids outside a candy store, noses pressed against the window glass, drooling at the goodies just out of reach.

Lure of Racing Too Strong for Lund and Donohue

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to a bunker. In automobile racing, it'll get you a crypt.

What there is of a man who won't be led by challenge isn't much a man at all, however. Which is to say that not one of us can look back upon Tiny Lund and Mark Donohue as they go to their graves and be licensed to cry out, "Why? Wasn't one career enough?"

FOR THE better part of two years, Tiny Lund had been out of it. Running his fishing camp on the Santee-Cooper Lake in South Carolina. The gregarious proprietor.

Large and full of the vigors of life. Sort of the Alan Hale of the stock cars removed to his new peace. Mark Donohue had been able to stand the silence less than a year.

And so on this same Sunday in August, an ocean apart, death looked them up in the middle of their comebacks. As if to confirm its democratic disposition, it took one from the open cockpit and ascot set, one from the Southern-fried, closed-cab boys.

Lund came to the NASCAR South from a small town in Iowa. Finding the fishing good around Moncks Corner, he settled there. His good nature created friends,

but came between him and the unrelenting pursuits required to open up things at the top.

HE HAD confined his racing mainly to the short tracks in recent years. It was difficult to understand his return to the Sunday dogfights on the sprawling speedways, unless the fishing business hadn't been so good lately.

Donohue was by no means a racing snob merely because he knew which knife and fork to use for what, and what a fingerbowl was for.

He mixed it up with the good ol' boys and showed them some of his fancier tricks. He was the first

Furman Bisher



man who ever won a NASCAR race in a Matador, which is like a sparrow taking on the eagles.

He'd won the Indianapolis 500, which is everything there is in racing. He'd won every kind of prize a man can win on wheels—except one. He'd never had a good go at Formula 5000. That would be the lure.

He said it himself one time. "It is the ultimate challenge." He also said another time, "I'll never take that one lap too many."

IT IS SADLY strange that Peter Revson's death should have led indirectly to Donohue's. When Revson crashed in South Africa, it left the seat vacant in Roger Penske's Grand Prix car. Donohue vacated the security of the president's chair in the Penske firm and returned to the cockpit and the crash helmet and the peril of the course.

The Grand Prix book is full of colorful pictures, of hillsides and feminine attractions both alluring and exciting and the names of a corps of great racing men who have preceded Donohue in death.

Simply out on practice runs, as Donohue was, Jochen Rindt, Francois Cevert and Peter Revson got it when their careers were at a boil.

Several years ago, Alberto Ascari, international champ twice in succession, died in a crash the third year. Jim Clark was racing

in Germany. Mike Hawthorne cracked up on the open road, Jo Bonnier at LeMans, when he was president of Grand Prix drivers and a noted crusader for safety.

THIS IS but a brief call of the roll to which Donohue's name shall be added. To him, it came in a pastoral countryside in Austria, on a track named Osterreicherung, which winds up and about hillsides and down again for 3.67 miles.

It is customary upon such occasions for the watchdogs of journalism to raise their voices in agonized critique. To point out with anguish that a fellow can be killed doing such things. To exclaim and wail and call for the innovation of some kind of new sanity.

In both cases, Donohue and Lund had tried out a new perspective and squirmed restlessly where they sat. Lund, perhaps, felt the press of economics. But Donohue had permanent prosperity in his grasp. He was born to prosperity, son of a well-to-do attorney, reared in the upper residential region of Summit, N. J., himself a graduate engineer from Brown University.

He'd allowed a sporting adventure to take possession of his life, then sworn off. Somewhere in the distance he'd picked up the haunting call of one more challenge, and one more time he had answered, as a man would.



MARK DONOHUE, flanked by race queens, grins from the victory circle after winning his last race, the International Race of Champions at Daytona Beach, Fla.