

# obituaries

**Charles Leo (Gabby) Hartnett**, one of the all-time great catchers and a member of the Hall of Fame, died of a liver ailment in Park Ridge, Ill., December 20, his 72nd birthday.

For 19 years he was the Cubs' catcher and for 2½ seasons he also was their manager. He reached the 20-year level as a player when he toiled as a catcher and coach with the Giants in 1941.

The florid-faced Hartnett—"Old Tomato Face" they called him—could do everything with consummate skill except run. "If Gabby had speed," Pie Traynor once said, "he could have been a .400 hitter

a couple of times."

As it was, Hartnett hit above .300 six times, with his best average (.354) coming in 1937 when he was 37 years old.

HE HIT 236 homers during the regular season and two more in the four World Series in which he played. All are forgotten, perhaps, except one, an historic smash in the almost dead-of-night on September 28, 1938, at Wrigley Field. It was the "homer in the gloaming."

At the time, the Cubs and the Pirates were battling for the pennant. It so happened Pittsburgh was the Cubs' opponent on that fateful day.

The score was tied, 5-5, in the bottom of the ninth and lightless Wrigley Field wore a mantle of darkness. The umpires had declared that this would be the last inning and, under the rules, the game would have to be replayed if it wound up in a stalemate.

BUT GABBY, then 38, settled the issue. With an 0-and-2 count against him, he plucked Mace Brown's curve ball out of the darkness and slammed it into the bleachers. For seconds there was almost dead silence, because few of the 34,465 fans could follow the ball. But suddenly arms shot up in the bleachers, reaching for the ball, and the crowd knew what had happened.

Gabby, too, sensed what had occurred and as he circled the bases he picked up a parade of fans and teammates. For those who could see, it was a sight to behold.

"It was the most sensational thing that ever happened to me," said Hartnett. "I got the kind of feeling you get when the blood rushes to your head and you get dizzy."

The bases-empty blow propelled the Cubs into first place by one-half game and they went on to win the pennant two days later in St. Louis.

HARTNETT was manager of the Cubs at the time, having taken over from Charlie Grimm in mid-season. But when the Cubs began to falter in 1940, Gabby was handed his hat at the end of the season and he caught on with the Giants in the player-coach role.

The jovial Hartnett had been playing semi-pro ball in the Millville, Mass., area when his talents were spotted by the pros. His first taste of Organized Baseball was with Worcester in 1921 and it was his only year in the minors before he stepped up to the majors.

The Cubs bought him and he was ordered to California for spring training in 1922.

Before he left Millville, his mother, who had 13 other young Hartnetts on the premises, advised her son: "Just keep quiet and let the older men do the talking."

Gabby took her advice and did more listening than talking at camp. A Chicago sportswriter dubbed him "Gabby" because of his reticence.

BUT THAT wasn't the real Hartnett, who always had been an outgoing Irishman. When he became a full-fledged member of the Cubs that season, he couldn't be muzzled behind the plate or on the bench. Truly, Gabby was the right name. Nevertheless, few of his teammates or fellow players called him that. To them he was Leo.

Hartnett caught the fancy of the fans immediately. He had a throwing arm that was second to none

and runners couldn't jar him loose from the plate. And his bat kept speaking with authority. In fact, his lifetime average was .297.

He was durable beyond expectations. In all, he appeared in 2,006 games, counting 16 in World Series play. And unlike almost every other catcher, he never had a broken finger.

HIS ONLY serious injury was a sore arm that kept him on the bench most of 1929. But he came back the following year and showed no signs of the ailment.

"I really can't tell you why I was fortunate in avoiding injury," he once said. "For one thing, I was lucky and for another I learned early to relax my hand. An old-timer taught me that when I first came up."

There were some who thought Hartnett might have been the greatest catcher of his time, better than Mickey Cochrane or Bill Dickey.

"I rated Gabby the perfect catcher," observed Joe McCarthy, one of the greatest managers. "He was super-smart and nobody could throw with him. And he also was an outstanding clutch hitter. I must take Hartnett as the best."

Hartnett also was a principal in the World Series game in which Babe Ruth was alleged to have pointed to a spot where he was going to hit a homer. Gabby was the catcher and Charley Root the pitcher.

"I don't want to take anything away from the Babe," Hartnett said, "because he helped us all get those good salaries. But he didn't call the shot. He was just replying to our bench jockeys. He held up one finger and he said, 'It only takes one to hit.'"

AS A MANAGER, the jovial Hartnett was more lenient with his athletes than most of his counterparts. He issued only two fines during his reign with the Cubs and Dizzy Dean was the victim both times. Diz had trouble keeping the curfews.

Hartnett himself got into only one jam during his career.

One day Al Capone, the racketeer, was sitting in a box near the Cub dugout and asked Gabby to autograph a ball for his nephew. As Gabby chatted with the underworld lord, a photographer took his picture smiling and leaning on the rail.

"Judge Landis saw the picture," said Gabby, "and issued an order banning fraternization with fans. Capone didn't mean anything to me. He and his nephew were just a couple of fans as far as I was concerned."

Following the 1941 season with the Giants, Hartnett became player-manager at Indianapolis in 1942 and held the same post with Jersey City the next two years. He piloted Buffalo in 1946, then returned to Chicago to devote full time to a bowling establishment he owned.

But after being out of baseball for almost 20 years, he had one more fling. That was with the Kansas City Athletics in 1965. Charlie Finley hired him as a coach. In '66 he was a scout and a member of the A's public relations department.

For the last few years, Hartnett, who was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1955, had been in declining health and absent from most of his old Chicago haunts.

Like most of the older Chicago fans, Cub Owner Phil Wrigley had a warm spot for Gabby.

"I'll never forget him," said Wrigley. "He was one of those men who played for the sheer joy of it."

Myrl M. Spicer, an inventor of electrical scoreboards, died in Pardeeville, Wis., December 18 after a short illness. He was 79.

Annoyed by delays in posting scores manually, Spicer created his first illuminated scoreboard in 1933 for use in basketball games. He



Gabby Hartnett... Cubs' Hall of Fame Catcher.

started a company—All-American Scoreboard Co.—and sold his products to thousands of high schools and colleges.

He also created scoreboards for many baseball and football stadiums, including the old Polo Grounds and Yankee Stadium in New York and Soldier Field in Chicago.

Spicer, a physics teacher and author, sold his company in 1952.

Milton Jowers, 59, athletic director at Southwest Texas State University and the school's former football and basketball coach, died in Houston December 16.

Jowers was football coach at the San Marcos school in 1951-53 and in 1961-64, compiling a 48-18-2 record. His basketball teams had a 287-105 log in the 15 years he was coach (1946-61). He won four Lone Star Conference cage titles and one grid championship.

Ron Rice, 36, an assistant football coach at the University of Maryland, died of a heart attack in Man, W. Va., December 19.

Rice had been stricken with another heart attack a week earlier while on a recruiting trip. He was a native of Belle, W. Va., and a graduate of West Virginia Tech.

Timothy Scott O'Brien, 15-year-old son of Daniel F. O'Brien, assistant to National Association President Henry J. Peters, died December 18 in Columbus, O., following a lengthy illness.

Joe Ironstone, 75, a goaltender in the National Hockey League in the 1920s, died recently in Sudbury, Ont. Ironstone played for Ottawa, Toronto and the New York Americans.

Harold Coulter, 60, father of Thomas (Chip) Coulter, a former Cardinal infielder now with Memphis (Texas), died of a heart attack in Toronto, O., recently.

Thomas J. Walsh, a golf pro for 50 years and president of the Professional Golfers Association from 1940 to 1942, died in Chicago December 18. He was 72.

## Short's Outlook Rosy

(Continued From Page 41)

gamble so much. Bob Short's personal image is unimportant, always has been. What I'm interested in is winning. My way didn't work, but this way will.

"It will be a long time before our off-season promotion can approximate that of some well-entrenched clubs, but already we're far ahead of last year when details of the club transfer delayed us.

"WITH WHITEY Herzog as manager and a new set of coaches, we figure to have an entirely new approach.

"If this turns out to be a good year financially," said Short, "and everything points to it, we'll be better able to deal next year.

"The rumors still persist that the

club is for sale, but Bob Short didn't start them. If I thought for a minute that a local man or group could make a better go of it for the people of Texas, I'd get out. I haven't seen any indication such a man or group exists.

"I can tell you the Rangers are not going to anyone for peanuts. The future is too great.

"I know we faced a big struggle last summer because we could not produce the kind of club the people deserve and I want to be associated with. This campaign will be better.

"We aren't through yet," Short declared. "There'll be more deals—I hope as good for us as I think the last few have been.

"It's been a tough four years, but things are looking up—starting in April."

## Bosox Tab Evans to Play RF

(Continued From Page 40)

Evans will take it easy for the rest of the winter and report to Winter Haven in March, determined to grab a regular job, most likely in right field. It is expected Reggie Smith will be moved to center and Tommy Harper to left, with Carl Yastrzemski staying at first base.

"I know I'm going to have to prove myself right away next season or be sent down," Evans admitted. "I'll be ready to do my best to win a job in Winter Haven."

Bosox Bunts: Evans has an excellent arm, one of the reasons he

probably will wind up in right field eventually with the Red Sox. The youngster does not appear the type who will hit a lot of homers. He hits up the alleys more than he pulls the ball. . . . Another player who will have to prove himself immediately with the Red Sox next spring is pitcher Rogelio Moret. Big things were expected of Moret, but he spent most of last season in Louisville for the second successive year. . . . Gene Tenace of the A's will receive a special award at the Boston baseball writers' dinner January 25. Tenace will be honored for his World Series heroics.

## HOBBY CORNER

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1969 Topps (AFL-NFL)	263	7.50	7.00
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1971 Topps (AFL-NFL)	263	6.50	6.00
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