

Heros
by Harry Zirkelbach 06-14-1020

The Saint, Genius and Hero have remained illusive historically.

In fact, that search needs an umpire, referee, perfect judge.
Even then and all might agree their qualifications,
judgment, impartiality could mar the result.

With youth no such problem.

The boy is inclined to measure their sports achievement against a local Hero,
find themselves wanting, go about improving this and that aspect of the particular game.
They will fail, but as sanity prevails, they do not expect perfection, the unachievable,
of that they are aware.

Baseball has been the game of Americas boys. Plenty of reasons.
The rules are understandable, fair; the hardware, new or used, is simple, readily available.
Any vacant lot, even a paved street, can provide a playing field.
And initial competition, against peers from the neighborhood.
And they are, and remain friends, win or lose,
as days disappear with the unrecorded scores, exploits.
The boys unwritten simple rule, no parental approval, supervision, just fun for all.
Non professional; everyone a winner.

All too soon, boy age, develops other interests. Most never play a pick-up or formal ball
game after grade school. That interest, desire, remain in the soul, but time, and
underachievement, remove the boy from the game of play,
into adulthood and its complexity.

I played baseball through grade school, could hit and field well enough.
My hero then was Arky Vaughn, shortstop, from the nearby Pittsburgh Pirate National
League baseball nine. Arky had came onto the Pirate scene soon after Honus Wagner
retired. Local Sports Writers thought and wrote
that Arky never measured up to then living, perfectionist, Honus.

This judgement continued through Arky's Pittsburgh years, despite flirting with batting .
400 in 1935, falling off the last weeks, ending with .385 an average bested only once in
last the 65 years of the National League. In the summer daily paper during the
depression, I always sought out the Pirate box-scores, was elated by his exploits,
saddened by failure. Even this day I am comfortable in what he did every summer day.

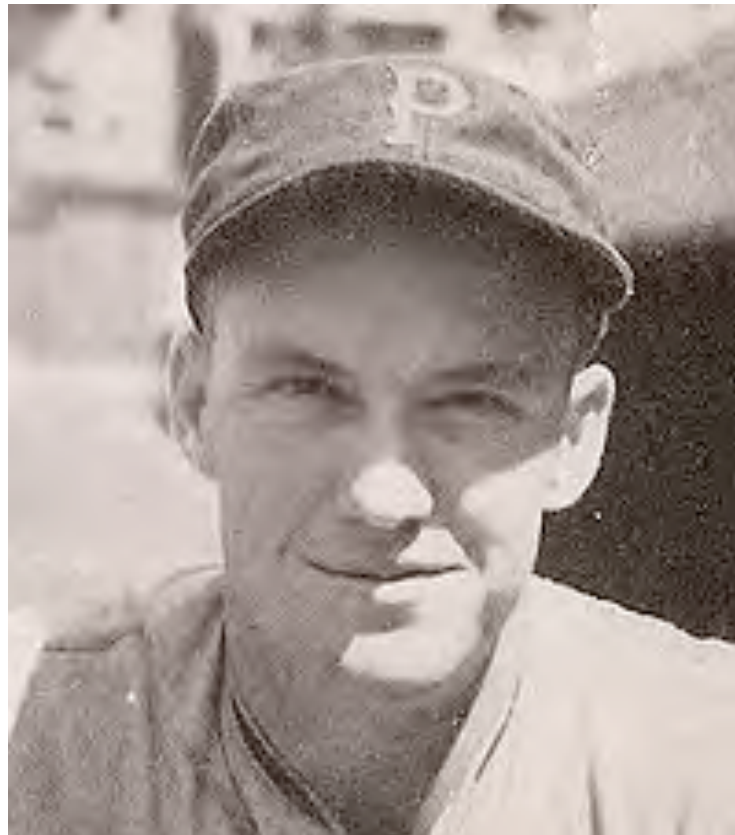
Yearly, from 1934 to 1943 Arky was the All-Star National League Shortstop selection. In Detroit's 1941 game, Arky hit right field Home Runs, deep, in his two times at bat. That gave the National League a seemingly comfortable lead, until the last of the ninth, with two on base, Ted Williams homered.

The earlier innings achievements, forgotten forever.

College and beyond, removed Sport Heros from my pantheon.

I maintain no baseball heros now, haven't for years. Many fine men have played baseball. Somehow in my yardstick, they just lack innocence, joy in win or loss, the imponderable element of eternal youth.

Arky Vaughn became a lump on my throat, and mind's radar, on Aug 30, 1952, when a sport report told that while Arky and a friend were fishing on Lost Lake, California, their small boat was overwhelmed by a sudden storm, and both were drowned.



Arky Vaughn was 40 years young.
He would never be my old hero.

He would never