

Between Fences in Northwest Wisconsin: from left to right and deep to center By: Matt Foss



Coming from northwest Wisconsin are three individuals that have emerged from this area and made a significant impact on the game of baseball. Burleigh Grimes, Andy Pafko, and Jarrod Washburn have all used their athletic abilities to represent the people of northwest Wisconsin well.

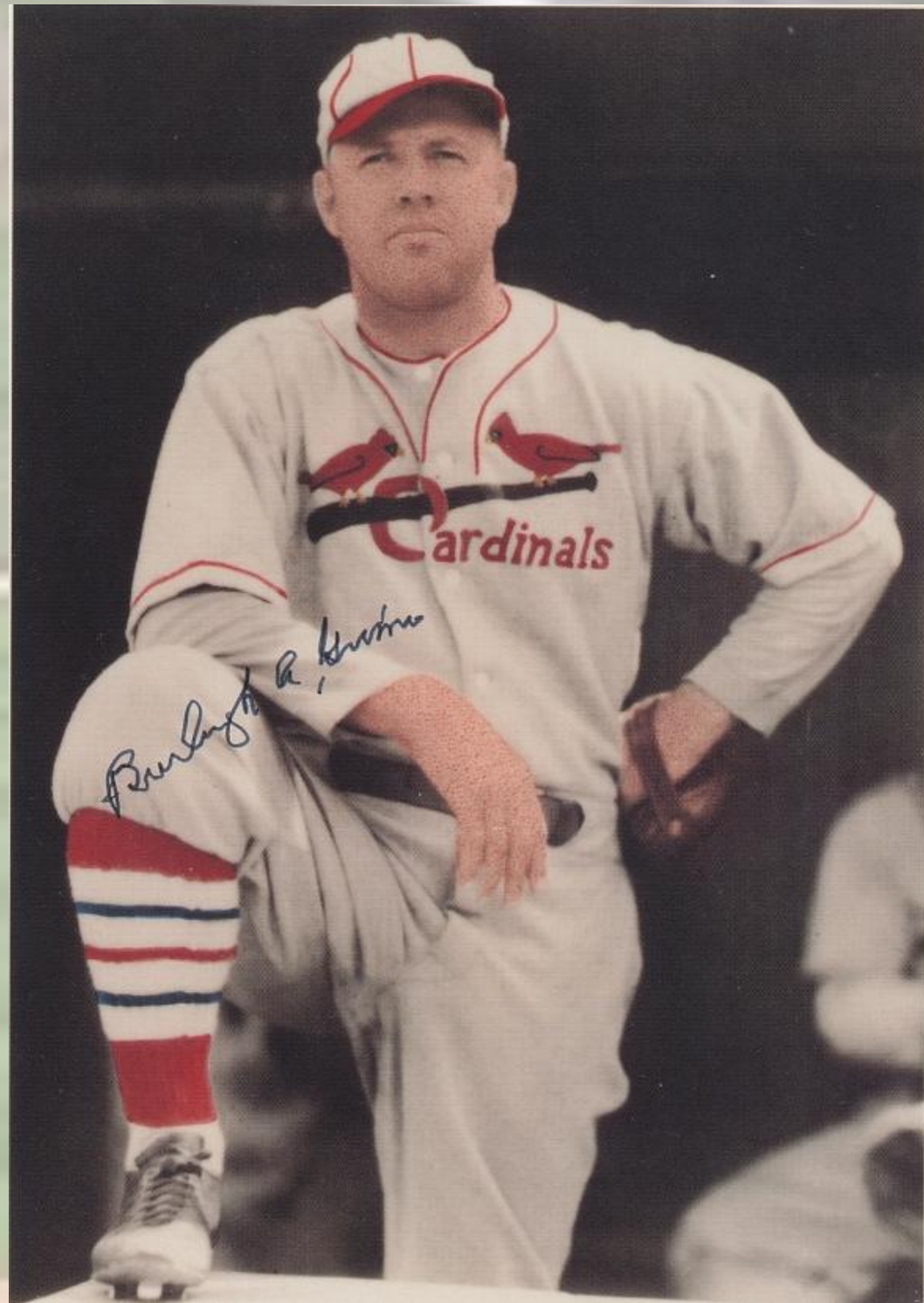


Photo of Burleigh Grimes during his playing days with the St. Louis Cardinals. Photo courtesy of Edna Bjorkman.

Burleigh Grimes, a Hall of Fame pitcher who hailed from Clear Lake, Wisconsin won the most games in Major League Baseball in the 1920s. He pitched for the Pittsburgh Pirates, New York Giants, Boston Braves, St. Louis Cardinals, Chicago Cubs, and briefly for the New York Yankees.^[1] Known as “Ol’ Stubblebeard,” Grimes was the last pitcher legally allowed to throw the spitball. By 1920, both the American and National league voted to ban the spitball, only allowing pitchers in both leagues who previously threw the spitball to continue using it legally.

The spitball, usually cut or rubbed with a substance by a pitcher would move through the air confusingly to the batter. Some pitchers used tobacco juice, some used spit, and some including Burleigh Grimes used “Slippery Elm,” the inside bark of an elm tree, which was also used for medicinal purposes in the early parts of the Twentieth Century.^[2]

In eighteen seasons, Burleigh Grimes won 270 games; good for 32nd all time in wins, threw thirty complete games in a season three times, 1921, 1923, and 1924, and is seventh all time in double plays started by a pitcher with seventy-four.^[3] John Kiernan wrote that Burleigh Grimes looked “like a man who was about to commit assault and battery when he threw the ball.”^[4] It was this style, and Grimes’s continual use of the spitball that cemented his role as one of the most important pitchers of the Twentieth Century.

While maybe not a fixture in baseball conversations around America, Andy Pafko, coming from nearby Boyceville, Wisconsin was a part of several key moments in the history of baseball. He was a five time All-Star, and played on four World Series teams, winning a world championship with the 1957 Milwaukee Braves. From 1943-1959 he played for the Chicago Cubs, Brooklyn Dodgers and Milwaukee Braves, batting .285 and hitting 213 home runs in his career. He was once quoted as saying that he “would rather play baseball than eat.”^[5]

As an outfielder for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1951, Pafko was the closest witness to arguably the most famous moment in the history of the game. On October 3rd, Pafko was in left field when Bobby Thompson hit a walk off home run off of Dodger pitcher Ralph Branca to deliver the National League Pennant to the New York Giants. It became known as “The shot heard round the world,” and the event was captured in the novella by Don DeLillo titled: *Pafko at the Wall*.



Andy Pafko, pictured fourth from the left with his Dodger teammates a day before the Dodgers lost the National League pennant to the Giants on Bobby Thompson’s home run. Photo from the New York Times, October 3rd, 1951.

Keeping up with the tradition set by Burleigh Grimes and Andy Pafko, northwest Wisconsin has Webster native Jarrod Washburn to root for in this day and age. Currently a starting pitcher for the Seattle Mariners, Jarrod Washburn has had a productive ten year career in Major League Baseball. Drafted by the Anaheim Angels in 1995, he helped the team win their first and only world championship in 2002, compiling an 18-6 record in the regular season. His total 93-86 record as a pitcher keeps him as a high commodity as pitchers go in the majors.^[6]



Photo of Jarrod Washburn during his days with the Anaheim Angels. In 2002, he was a major part of the Angels team that won the World Series against the San Francisco Giants. Photo courtesy of MLB.com

[1] Baseball-Reference.com, accessed 12/12/07.
[2] “The Spitball Pitch Legal Disenfranchisement” and “Slippery Elm for a better Spitball” by Paul Wenzel. The Society for American Baseball Research online, 2002. Accessed 1/18/07.
[3] Society for American Baseball Research, *The SABR Baseball List and Record Book: baseball's most fascinating records and unusual statistics* (New York: Scribner's, 2007), 199, 231, 304.
[4] Daniel Okrent and Steve Wulf, *Baseball Anecdotes* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 89-90.
[5] Bill James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 761.
[6] Baseball-Reference.com, accessed 12/12/07.