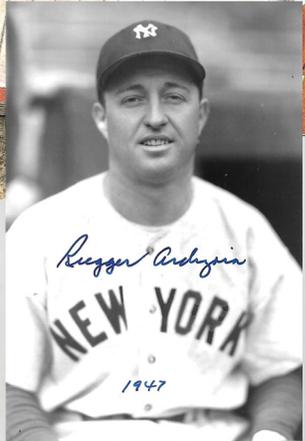
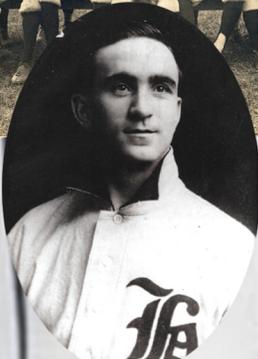
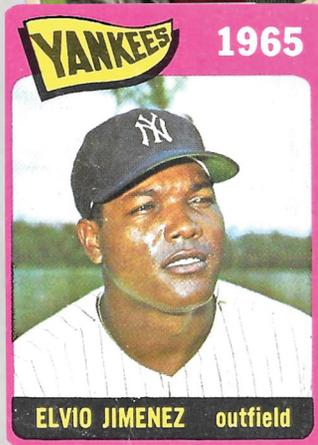
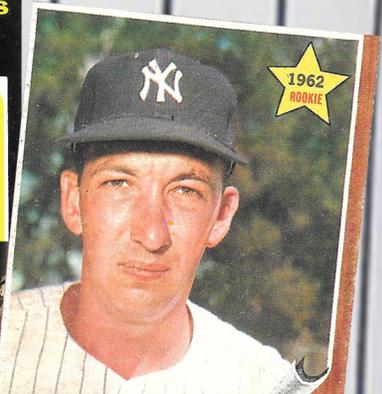
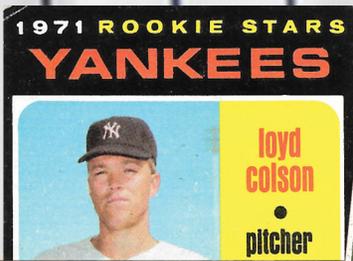
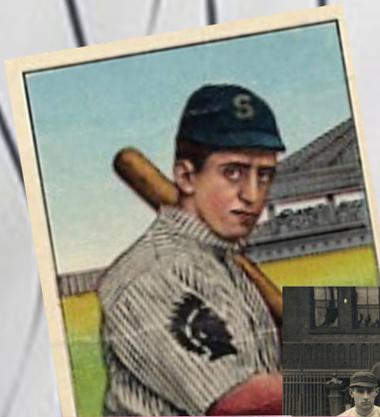


# THE LEAST AMONG THEM

29 PLAYERS,  
THEIR BRIEF MOMENTS IN THE BIG LEAGUES,  
AND A UNIQUE HISTORY OF THE NEW YORK YANKEES



PAUL RUSSELL SEMENDINGER

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Artemesia  
Publishing

## Praise for *The Least Among Them*

“True Yankee fans, those who have attained a virtual Ph.D. level of fandom, can address each other in code. They can say “34” and know they are referring to Tony Kubek’s rookie uniform number. So now comes this, perhaps the ultimate insider book. If you say ‘Loyd Colson’ to a Yankee fan and get a knowing wink in return, with a reminder that there is only one ‘L’ in Loyd, you know you are talking to someone worthy. Otherwise, send them home to read Paul Semendinger’s book of one-game wonders and tell them not to return until they have mastered it. Only then can they write ‘Ph.D. NYY’ after their names.”

Marty Appel, Yankee historian and former team executive, and author of *Pinstripe Empire: The New York Yankees from Before the Babe to After the Boss*.

“Forget Babe, Lou, and the Mick for a moment, and enjoy the stories of Honey, Ruggie, and Clem. This charming and meticulously researched book will remind you of baseball’s power to change and enrich lives far beyond the diamond.”

Jonathan Eig, New York Times best-selling author of *Luckiest Man*, *Opening Day*, and *Ali: A Life*

“In the United States, there are surely more books written about baseball than any other sport. Even Amazon can’t keep a tally. When you type ‘baseball books’ into the search window, Amazon has the total narrowed to “over 20,000.” So you’d think all the good baseball-book ideas have been used up by now. But here comes author Paul Russell Semendinger with a fresh angle. His new book, *The Least Among Them: 29 Players, Their Brief Moments in the Big Leagues, and A Unique History of the New York Yankees*, is a fascinating study of luck, timing and the unpredictable, arduous, near-impossible path to the Major Leagues. These are the stories of men who spent a single day with the Yankees. Elvio Jimenez in 1964 was fortunate enough in his one game to play 13 innings. Frank Verdi in 1953 played one, never touching the ball and never stepping to the plate. Charlie Fallon in 1905 was a pinch runner in the last inning back when the Yankees were

the Highlanders. Floyd Newkirk in 1934 pitched a solid ninth inning despite having just three fingers on his pitching hand. That's another thing I like about the book—the short history lessons interspersed with the players' stories. Most of us know that Derek Jeter had the longest tenure as Yankees team captain with 12. But did you know Babe Ruth had the shortest with just five games? Semendinger is a fine writer and his passion for the game—and its players—shine through every page of *The Least Among Them*.”

Joan Ryan, award-winning journalist and New York Times bestselling author of five books including *Intangibles*

“The most impressive scholarship on the Yankees I have read, *The Least Among Them* literally fills the gaping hole between biographies of famous Yankees of world fame and national attention, like *Dinner with DiMaggio*, with genuinely profound sketches of lesser-known Yankees who could have nudged the likes of the Yankee Clipper but could not. It reads like a good novel. It's a page turner mainly because the writing is superb, the scholarship involved impeccable, and the author sticks to his narrative in spite of a bewildering history of Minor, Major and international League involvement of his many profiles. It is a back door history: we get the origin of the Seventh Inning Stretch, three fingered ball players, a history of varied “Docs” (ball players with that nickname and why) and other social histories. If you are a Yankee fan, and want a good read, *The Least Among Them* is a mandatory purchase.”

Dr. Rock Positano and John Positano, award-winning authors of *Dinner With DiMaggio*

“I am an admirer of deep dives when it comes to baseball, and Paul splashes elegantly into the pool in this regard. Exhaustively researched and very well-crafted, even a Mets guy like me can appreciate his work! This is for fans who want to fill their curiosity gaps; Paul has done the work and done it well. If you like learning things you never knew, and if the Yankees are your team, jump on in.”

Josh Lewin, Sportscaster (Fox Sports, and various teams including the Mets, Red Sox, Cubs, Rangers, Orioles, and Tigers)

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen a book quite like it—the least storied players on baseball’s most storied team. Paul Semendinger digs deep to find not the hidden gems of the Yankee organization but the fool’s gold—players who for one reason or another lasted but a single game with the Bombers. It’s a fascinating concept and Semendinger’s book delivers. Semendinger manages to pull off the seemingly impossible—a deep dive into the shallow waters of these most minor Yankees. Pick up a copy and I promise that you’ll stick with it longer than these guys did in pinstripes.”

Mitchell Nathanson, author of *Bouton: The Life of a Baseball Original* and *God Almighty Himself: The Life and Legacy of Dick Allen*

“*The Least Among Them* is a treasure trove of fascinating stories about lesser known Yankees, lovingly researched and crafted by writer/historian Paul Semendinger. A must-read for Yankee fans and the baseball cognoscenti.”

Jon Leonoudakis, Baseball Documentarian

“*The Least Among Them* is a unique and fascinating work, a look at the greatest of sports franchises through its most marginal players. Here are the good, the bad, the ugly, and even the (briefly) perfect, men who for one reason or another lasted just one game for the New York Yankees. Paul Semendinger pivots from their individual stories—poignant, tragic, uplifting—to tell the extraordinary story of baseball.”

Kevin Baker, author of *Sometimes You See It Coming and Becoming Mr. October (with Reggie Jackson)*

“Paul Semendinger cleverly unravels New York Yankees history by pulling on the string of 29 players whose Major League careers consisted of one game with the club. While telling their unknown stories, he finds connections with other Yankees and events. *The Least Among Them* is a delightful journey into the past of baseball’s most hallowed franchise.”

Barry Sparks, author of *Frank “Home Run” Baker: World Series Hero and Hall of Famer*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 Elvio Jimenez (1964).....	1
<i>Extra Innings: Tommy John and his Surgery</i>	
Chapter 2 Frank Verdi (1953).....	12
<i>Extra Innings: The Story of Orlando “El Duque” Hernandez</i>	
Chapter 3 Charlie Fallon (1905).....	23
<i>Extra Innings: A History of the NY Yankees Captains</i>	
Chapter 4 Art Goodwin (1905).....	31
<i>Extra Innings: The Top Yankees’ Minor League Affiliates</i>	
Chapter 5 Phil Cooney (1905).....	38
<i>Extra Innings: The Unassisted Triple Play</i>	
Chapter 6 Roger Slagle (1979).....	45
<i>Extra Innings: The Longest-Tenured Yankees Teammates</i>	
Chapter 7 Floyd Newkirk (1934).....	54
<i>Extra Innings: Yankees in Combat in World War II</i>	
Chapter 8 Honey Barnes (1926).....	63
<i>Extra Innings: Mark Koenig and The Babe’s Called Shot</i>	
Chapter 9 Steve Garrison (2011).....	70
<i>Extra Innings: Yankees Who Came from Japan</i>	
Chapter 10 Eddie Quick (1903).....	79
<i>Extra Innings: Some Yankees Who Changed Their Names</i>	
Chapter 11 Homer Thompson (1912).....	86
<i>Extra Innings: Yankee Brothers</i>	
Chapter 12 George Batten (1912).....	95
<i>Extra Innings: A Void in Monument Park</i>	
Chapter 13 Harry Hanson (1913).....	104
<i>Extra Innings: A Watershed Year</i>	
Chapter 14 Jim Hanley (1913).....	111
<i>Extra Innings: The Seventh-Inning Stretch</i>	
Chapter 15 Rugger Ardizoia (1947).....	118
<i>Extra Innings: Yankees Born in Europe</i>	
Chapter 16 Stefan Wever (1982).....	127
<i>Extra Innings: The Tallest Yankees of All Time</i>	
Chapter 17 Sam Marsonsek (2004).....	136
<i>Extra Innings: A Forgotten Two-Sport Legend</i>	

Chapter 18 Christian Parker (2001).....	146
<i>Extra Innings: How Yaz Almost Became a Yankee</i>	
Chapter 19 Hal Stowe (1960).....	153
<i>Extra Innings: Dave Righetti's Move to the Bullpen</i>	
Chapter 20 Walter Bernhardt (1918).....	159
<i>Extra Innings: Doctors Who Played for the Yankees</i>	
Chapter 21 Jack Enright (1917).....	167
<i>Extra Innings: Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb Compete at Golf</i>	
Chapter 22 Larry McClure (1910).....	173
<i>Extra Innings: The Shortest Yankees All-Stars</i>	
Chapter 23 Tom Burr (1914).....	180
<i>Extra Innings: Sad Tales of Airplanes and Yankees</i>	
Chapter 24 Heinie Odom (1925).....	186
<i>Extra Innings: The True Story of Wally Pipp's Headache</i>	
Chapter 25 Clem Llewellyn (1922).....	193
<i>Extra Innings: The Least Among Them Managers</i>	
Chapter 26 George Washburn (1941).....	201
<i>Extra Innings: The End of Joe DiMaggio's Streak</i>	
Chapter 27 Bob Davidson (1989).....	209
<i>Extra Innings: Position Players Who Pitched</i>	
Chapter 28 Loyd Colson (1970).....	218
<i>Extra Innings: The First Designated Hitter</i>	
Chapter 29 Two Who Might Join the Team (2015).....	225
<i>Extra Innings: An Amazing Comeback</i>	
Chapter 30 Andy O'Connor (1908).....	229
<i>Extra Innings: A "Casey At The Bat" Moment</i>	
Chapter 31 The Most Famous Least Among Them Players of All Time (1947).....	237
Notes, Sources and References.....	240
About the Author.....	249

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he history of baseball can, in large part, be told through the exploits of the New York Yankees. The Yankees are Major League Baseball's most successful franchise having won 40 pennants and 27 World Series. No other franchise comes close to this record of dominance. Some of the greatest players in baseball history established their legends while wearing the Yankee pinstripes: Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, Reggie Jackson, Mariano Rivera, and Derek Jeter. In addition, there were other players, probably not quite as great, but just as notable who also brought glory to the franchise. Every thorough history of baseball includes the names Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford, Roger Maris, and so many others. These players tower over the record books—their greatness unquestioned.

The Yankees also appear quite frequently in popular culture. When Ernest Hemingway referenced a baseball player in *The Old Man and the Sea*, he used Joe DiMaggio. Songwriter Paul Simon also wrote lyrics about Joe D. Other musicians, among them Les Brown, Billy Joel, Madonna, and Jay-Z have included Yankee references in some of their most famous songs. The Yankees have been featured in numerous feature films. The franchise has even appeared on Broadway in a number of stage productions, most notably in the hit play *Damn Yankees*. The Yankees are ubiquitous. They seem to be everywhere both in and out of the sports world.

Volumes have been written about the Yankees, yet there are some stories that have not been told—tales of men whom history seems to have forgotten. Alongside the legends who played for the Yankees were these ballplayers whose entire Major League career lasted for just one solitary game. For one day, just one,

they played alongside some of baseball's greatest heroes. This book tells their stories.

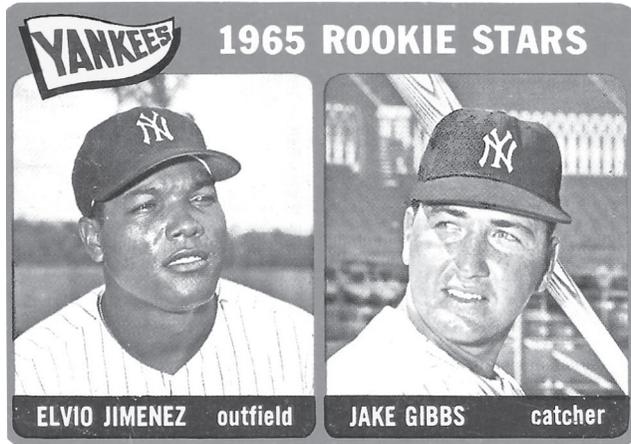
Here are the stories of men whose names may be unfamiliar, but who were New York Yankees, if only for a day. The stories of these players are compelling. Some have great names like Homer Thompson, Ruggie Ardizioia, and Eddie Quick. Numerous players including Frank Verdi and Floyd Newkirk are enshrined in lesser-known halls of fame. At least one of these players holds a unique Major League record. Some were perfect—others not so much. In the annals of baseball history their stories are rarely, if ever, shared. That changes with this text. Here I bring these players' stories to life.

The stories of these players though do not end with that lone Major League appearance. A single moment does not define a life. Five of these men served in the United States military during World War I or World War II with one dying in service to his country and one who served in both of the great wars. Many of the men stayed in the game as coaches, managers, and scouts, but others left to follow careers outside the game. Before and after their single day with the Yankees, these men found success in other areas. On the pages that follow, we will find doctors and leaders, community members, and fathers. These players might not have been big leaguers for long, but many were impressive individuals.

Through their stories, I will also explore additional baseball history, most often related in some way, to the history of the New York Yankees. Some myths are shattered as I tell the true stories behind some famous moments that have become part of the grand history of baseball.

Even today many little children dream at one point or another about playing Major League Baseball. (I know some adults who still hold onto that dream.) These men lived it. They wore the Yankees uniform. They played professional baseball in front of paying customers. It may have been for a fleeting moment, but they each had their one day in the sun. In the pages that follow, I bring these players back and allow them to reside alongside their more famous teammates with whom they once spent a brief moment in time.

When comparing the players in this book to their more famous Yankees brethren, one might say that they were indeed *The Least Among Them...*



Courtesy of The Topps Company.

## CHAPTER ONE ELVIO JIMENEZ (1964)

**F**or a man who appeared in only one game in his Major League career, Elvio Jimenez sure had promise. Numerous experts predicted stardom for this young outfield prospect signed as an amateur free agent by the Yankees in 1959. This potential is clearly seen in Jimenez's first appearance on a baseball card. In 1965, Elvio is depicted alongside catching prospect Jake Gibbs as a "Yankees Rookie Star." The chance for big league success for Elvio Jimenez seemed all but certain. Interestingly, the Topps Chewing Gum Company, who produced these popular baseball cards, did not have a great proofreader. On the front of the card Elvio's last name is spelled correctly, but on the reverse it is spelled Jiminez. Nonetheless, the card speaks to this player's potential as it states, *"In seven campaigns in the minors, Elvio topped the .300 mark five times."* The man could certainly hit.

Born January 6, 1940 in the Dominican Republic, Jimenez reached the big leagues when he was twenty-four years old as a member of the 1964 New York Yankees. His performance on what would become his single day in the Major Leagues may

have influenced the Topps Company to highlight Jimenez again as a future star in its 1965 baseball card series, but, as we will see, it wasn't to be.

One can only imagine what that must have been like to join the Yankees franchise in 1964. At that time, the Yankees were in the midst of their greatest dynasty. Between 1949 and 1964, the Yankees appeared in every World Series save for two (1954 and 1959). They won nine of those World Series. The sports world had never seen anything like this dominance before and it has not since. This was the club, the mighty Yankees, that Jimenez joined that summer. It had been a long road for him to reach this pinnacle of his playing career.

Elvio Jimenez made it to the Yankees after a steady progression through the minor leagues. His career began in 1959 when he was nineteen years old playing for the St. Petersburg Saints, a Yankees affiliate in the D League, the lowest level of the minors at that time. Jimenez played 132 games that first year and accumulated an impressive .329 batting average to go along with 29 doubles, 17 triples, and 10 home runs. He led the league in triples, hits (181) and total bases (274). Elvio Jimenez earned recognition as an All-Star in the Florida State League. For the 1960 season, he was promoted to C Level baseball and played 105 games for the Modesto Reds of the California League. He again impressed with his batting skills, compiling a very impressive .368 batting average which was enough to place him second in the California League in batting and recognition once again as a league All-Star. 1961 saw Jimenez earn another promotion, this time to a Single-A ball club playing in New York, albeit, not the big city, but 183 miles to the northwest in Binghamton. His .299 batting average helped earn him a promotion the next year, 1962, to the Amarillo Gold Sox of the Double-A Texas League. His prolific batting continued as he posted a .310 batting average. Indeed, the man could certainly hit.

Along the way to the majors, as he toiled through the minors one step at a time, Jimenez played alongside numerous future Yankees. He was often a teammate of Yankees second baseman Horace Clarke; playing together in 1959 and again from 1961 through 1964. While playing in the bushes, Jimenez also played

with future Yankee pitching stars Al Downing and Mel Stottlemyre. It is apparent that the Yankees were moving Elvio Jimenez on the same path with their most highly regarded prospects. In fact, by 1961, Jimenez was so well regarded, that he was invited to spring training. That year he roomed with Al Downing in the still-segregated South as the black players were not permitted to live with the rest of the team.

The most interesting teammate Jimenez may have had, though, was an infielder who no longer had much of a future as a player. Alongside Elvio Jimenez on the 1962 Gold Sox was a thirty-six-year-old light-hitting infielder named Frank Verdi. Verdi played in only 23 games that year hitting a paltry .192. At that point, Verdi had fewer than 33 minor league games left in his playing career. His dream had already passed. Once, for a single day in 1953, he had been a New York Yankee.

By 1963, it was evident that Jimenez was on the steady track to the Major Leagues. He began the season at Double-A with the Augusta Yankees in the Sally League, but after hitting .331 in 82 games, he was promoted to the Triple-A Richmond Virginians, the highest level of the minor leagues. There, Elvio Jimenez continued to impress. He batted .316 for the Virginians. Jimenez was even called, the Yankees' "brightest rookie prospect."

Invited again to spring training in 1964, Elvio Jimenez forced new Yankees manager Yogi Berra into a difficult decision—carry Jimenez on the bench or send him back to Triple-A Richmond for some needed at-bats. At the time Berra commented, "Everybody knows he isn't going to break into my outfield—not with Roger Maris, Mickey Mantle, and Tom Tresh around. The big thing to see is how he does as a pinch hitter." Toward the end of spring training, Berra optioned Jimenez to the minors with some words of advice, "Work on your defense and we'll call you back up." At Richmond, Jimenez hit .296 and set the International League record for best fielding average (1.000) for an outfielder. This performance placed him on the International League All-Star team. It was at the conclusion of that 1964 campaign that Jimenez finally earned his promotion to the Yankees.

October 4, 1964 was a dry but overcast day in New York City. The Yankees had already clinched the American League pennant

and were finishing out the season before they would face the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series. However, the last game of the regular season, against the Cleveland Indians, had to come first. Fewer than 11,000 fans came to the ballpark for the 1:30 p.m. game in the Bronx.

The 1964 Cleveland Indians were a mediocre team finishing the year with a 79-83 record which was good enough for sixth place in the ten-team American League. While there were numerous players of minor note on that Cleveland team, there were no standout players. Their only player on the All-Star team that year was Jack Kralick, a left-handed pitcher who didn't even appear in the game.

For this last game of the 1964 season, Elvio Jimenez was penciled in as the starting left fielder by Yogi Berra. He was placed in the third spot in the batting order. Since it was the last game of the season, most of the Yankees starters, including Bobby Richardson, Elston Howard, Tom Tresh, Roger Maris, and Mickey Mantle were given the day off. For Elvio Jimenez, his long, but steady climb through the minors seemed over. He had arrived.

On this day, Jim Bouton, at this point a highly touted young pitcher who had won 18 games that year, was making his league-leading 37th start of the year for the Yankees. After retiring the first batter, Vic Davalillo on a ground out to second base, Bouton faced Dick Howser, the Indians' shortstop. Howser, who would later coach and would, in 1980, manage the Yankees to a division title, singled to left field. This gave Jimenez his first opportunity to actively participate in a Major League game. He fielded the ball cleanly and returned it to the infield.

In the bottom of the first inning, Elvio Jimenez came to bat after the first two Yankee batters were retired. Elvio, a right-handed batter, stood in against Luis Tiant, the Indians' hard-throwing pitcher. This was the final game of Tiant's rookie season—a year that saw him win ten games which jump-started his very successful nineteen-year career. (Toward the end of his career, Tiant played for the 1979 and 1980 Yankees. His manager in 1980 was the man playing shortstop behind him who had singled in the top of the first inning, Dick Howser.)

In his first big league at-bat, Jimenez grounded out to Hows-

er to end the first inning.

Then, with one out in the top of the second inning, Cleveland's third baseman, Max Alvis hit a fly ball to left field. Elvio Jimenez caught it for the second out and had recorded his first Major League putout.

By the time Jimenez came to bat in the bottom of the third inning, the game was tied 1-1. The only Cleveland run to this point was recorded on a home run, hit by none other than the Indians' pitcher, Luis Tiant. In this second at-bat of his career, Jimenez again placed his bat on the ball, but he flew out to right field ending the inning. He was now hitless in two tries.

Elvio Jimenez did not see any more action in the field until the top of the fifth inning when, with two outs, Vic Davalillo, a future All-Star, flied out to him to end the frame.

In the bottom of the sixth inning, with the score still tied, Jimenez came to bat for the third time. There was one out. Luis Tiant was still on the mound. For Jimenez, the third time was the charm. He took Tiant's offering and drove a single to centerfield for his first Major League hit. Jimenez then reached second base on a single by Johnny Blanchard, often a catcher, but on this day, the Yankees' right fielder. Following that single, the final two batters were retired.

As the game progressed, both Yogi Berra, the Yankees manager, and Birdie Tebbetts, the Indians manager, made frequent substitutions. Jim Bouton was replaced after three innings by Hal Rennif. Rennif was followed in succession by Mel Stottlemyre, Steve Hamilton, and Bill Stafford. After six innings of work for the Indians, Luis Tiant was replaced by another rookie, a left-handed pitcher named Tommy John. In John's future lay a 26-year career that included two tenures as a Yankee. Tommy John twice won over 20 games in New York. He would also pitch, with Tiant, as a member of the 1980 Yankees squad under manager Dick Howser.

Jimenez came to bat in the bottom of the eighth inning against Tommy John with the score still tied 1-1. This time he was batting with two outs. For the second consecutive time, Elvio Jimenez singled to center field. Johnny Blanchard again singled him to second, but again the other batters could get him no further.

Stan Williams came out of the Yankee bullpen to pitch the ninth inning. With two outs, Tito Francona doubled over Jimenez's head in left field, but the Indians couldn't score him. The Yankees also couldn't score in their half of the ninth inning. In his first Major League game Elvio Jimenez was certainly getting his money's worth as the game went into extra innings.

In the top of the tenth inning, Jimenez once again tracked down a fly ball and recorded an out from the bat of Vic Davilillo. In the top of the eleventh, Leon Wagner also flew out to Jimenez. In the bottom of that frame, Jimenez came to bat again, this time against Sonny Siebert. Jimenez popped out to the third baseman.

The game continued.

Finally, in the top of the thirteenth inning, the Indians pushed across a run. Vic Davilillo had led off the inning with a bunt single. With one out, he was driven to third on a single by Fred Whitfield. It is interesting to note, that with Davilillo at third base, the game in extra innings, and the season coming to a close, manager Yogi Berra made two defensive changes. First, he brought Johnny Blanchard in from right field to catch (replacing Jake Gibbs who would appear on the 1965 Topps Future Stars baseball card with Elvio Jimenez) and placed the sure-handed Joe Pepitone in right field. The season might have been in its concluding moments but it is evident that Berra still wanted the victory. The next batter, Leon Wagner hit a groundball to first base where Mike Hegan attempted to start a double play by throwing to the shortstop. Wagner beat the return throw to first with Davilillo scoring giving Cleveland a 2-1 lead.

Hard-throwing "Sudden" Sam McDowell (a future Yankee himself) came out of the Indians' bullpen to close out the game and the season. Due to the many substitutions, McDowell would be facing mostly Yankees regulars who had anticipated having the day off. First came Elston Howard. He struck out. Bobby Richardson then grounded out to the pitcher. With two outs though, Joe Pepitone singled past the second baseman. This brought up Elvio Jimenez with the game on the line.

For Jimenez, this was his sixth at-bat of the day. He had already recorded two hits. With Pepitone leading off first base, Jimenez hit a ground ball to shortstop. The throw across the infield beat

him to the bag. The game, the season, and Elvio Jimenez's Major League Baseball career all ended when the ball stuck in first baseman Fred Whitfield's glove.

In 1965, Elvio Jimenez returned to the minor leagues. He had a solid season, hitting .297 for the Toledo Mud Hens. His manager that year was his former minor league teammate, Frank Verdi. Mike Hegan, who wasn't able to turn the double play in that last game in 1964, was also on the team, as was Jimenez's baseball card companion Jake Gibbs.

The 1966 season saw Jimenez playing at both Double-A and Triple-A for Yankees affiliates, but by 1967, Elvio Jimenez was the property of the Pittsburgh Pirates organization. Jimenez's first minor league season for his new organization saw him hit .340 for the Columbus Jets. Playing alongside Elvio in that minor league outfield was a special person, his brother Manny. Manny Jimenez had been playing in the major and minor leagues for many years. He had seen a fair amount of big league time with stints on the Kansas City Athletics and the Pittsburgh Pirates. Manny would return to the Major Leagues in 1968 for the Pirates and in 1969 for the Chicago Cubs. Also on that 1967 minor league team was a pitcher named Jim Shellenback with whom Elvio Jimenez would forever share space on another baseball card. Still feeling that he was a player with great potential, the Topps Company again listed Jimenez as a Rookie Star; this time with the Pirates for their 1969 baseball card series. Jimenez never made good on those "future star" predictions.

After the 1971 season, Elvio Jimenez was out of professional baseball in the United States. In 1972, he began a four-year career in the Mexican League. He later served as a scout for the Dodgers and Red Sox organizations.

Jimenez's biggest claim to fame may have been the fact that he was the scout who signed pitching sensation Fernando Valenzuela for the Dodgers. In 1981, Valenzuela captured all of baseball's interest as he won the NL Rookie of the Year Award and helped propel the Dodgers to a world championship over the Yankees. For his contribution to that championship, Elvio Jimenez was awarded a World Series ring.

Elvio Jimenez sure could hit. Over the course of 17 minor

## The Least Among Them

league seasons, he batted .307 with 120 home runs and 783 runs batted in. He played over 1,600 minor league games with more than one thousand coming at Triple-A, the highest level of the minors.

Jimenez had a brief Major League career. Still, of all the players in the history of baseball who played only one game, he is tied for the record for the most at-bats (6). With two hits, both off of long-time Major League stars, he also retired with a batting average of .333.

## *Extra Innings*

### *Tommy John and His Surgery*

**I**n his sole Major League game, Elvio Jimenez singled off of left-handed pitcher Tommy John. John was a rookie in 1964 and his career was a long one, lasting into the 1989 season. In total, Tommy John spent 26 years in the big leagues pitching for the Cleveland Indians, Chicago White Sox, Los Angeles Dodgers, New York Yankees, California Angels, and Oakland A's. John was a four-time All-Star and was twice (1977 and 1979) the runner-up for the Cy Young Award (once in the National League and once in the American League). Only twenty-five pitchers have won more games in their career than the 288 won by Tommy John. Yet, in spite of his overall success, Tommy John is best remembered not for what he did on the field; instead, he is best remembered for the surgery that is named after him.

After the 1964 season referenced above, Tommy John was part of a three-team trade that sent him to the Chicago White Sox and brought Cleveland favorite Rocky Colavito back to the Indians from whom he had been traded five long years before. Tommy John pitched for the White Sox for seven seasons winning 82 games against 80 losses. He was a solid pitcher winning in double figures every year but one while with Chicago. Still, there was a sense that he was an underachiever, and, at the conclusion of the 1971 season he was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a deal that brought the controversial slugger Richie Allen to the White Sox. It was in Los Angeles that Tommy John started to pitch to his potential. (Of note Richie Allen won the American League Most Valuable Player Award for the White Sox immediately after this trade.) In 1973, Tommy John had his best season winning 16 games against only 7 defeats. By July 1974, Tommy John, with a 13-3 record, was widely considered one of the best pitchers in the National League. Yet, in a game against the Montreal Expos on

July 17, Tommy John tore a ligament in his left elbow. He was unable to pitch again that season. The prescribed rest that followed the injury did not help. He was unable to throw.

The type of injury Tommy John succumbed to was, until this point, a career-ending injury. During his failed rehabilitation period, Tommy John had talked with Dr. Frank Jobe, a member of the Dodgers' medical staff. Dr. Jobe recommended a surgery that had never been attempted before—taking a ligament from John's right arm and using it to replace the ruptured tendon in his left arm. Feeling that his career was over without the surgery, Tommy John agreed to the procedure not knowing if it would be successful enough to allow him to play baseball again.

For over a year after the surgery, Tommy John worked through a vigorous rehabilitation. Progress was slow, but John gave this process his very best efforts. By the end of the 1975 season, Tommy John was working his way back and was able to throw batting practice.

In 1976, Tommy John returned to the Major Leagues. He became known as the man with the bionic arm. In the next four seasons, Tommy John won 20 games three times, two of those seasons coming with the Yankees. His success following the surgery was remarkable. Tommy John actually won more games after his surgery (164) than before it (124). Amazingly, Tommy John pitched for thirteen seasons after the surgery. In his final season, 1989, Tommy John, at 46 years old, was the Yankees' Opening Day starting pitcher.

Tommy John's willingness to embrace an untried surgical procedure broke down the preconceived notions athletes had regarding what was once a career-ending injury. This new approach was simply revolutionary. It can be argued that no procedure has revolutionized baseball, or even all of sport as much as the procedure that has since become known as Tommy John surgery.

# CLEVELAND INDIANS at NEW YORK YANKEES

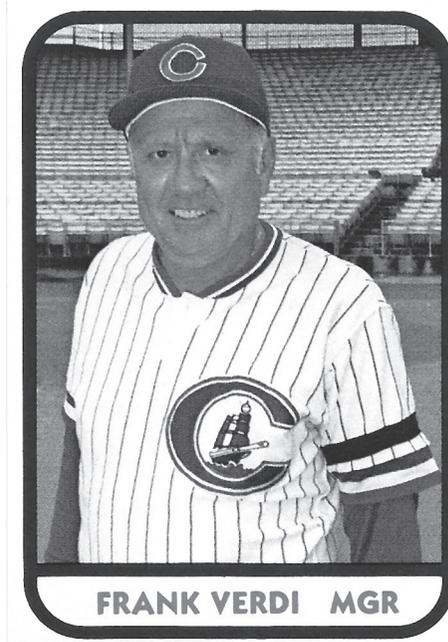
Sunday, October 4, 1964 (Yankee Stadium)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	R	H	E
CLE	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	10	0
NY	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	1

CLE		AB	R	H	RBI	NY		AB	R	H	RBI
Davalillo	CF	6	1	1	0	Linz	SS	3	0	0	0
Howser	SS	4	0	2	0	Richardson	PH/SS	3	0	0	0
Banks	PH2B	2	0	0	0	Gibbs	C	5	0	0	0
Chance	1B	5	0	2	0	Pepitone	RF	1	0	1	0
Luplow	PR					<b>Jimenez</b>	LF	6	0	2	0
Whitfield	1B	1	0	1	0	Blanchard	RF/C	4	1	4	0
Wagner	LF	6	0	0	1	Lopez	3B	5	0	0	0
Held	LF					Hegan	1B	4	0	0	0
Francona	RF	4	0	1	0	Gonzalez	2B	5	0	0	0
Agee	PR/RF	2	0	1	0	Moore	CF	5	0	1	1
Alvis	3B	4	0	1	0	Bouton	P	1	0	0	0
Martinez	2B	3	0	0	0	Reniff	P				
John	P					Tresh	PH	1	0	0	0
Salmon	PH	0	0	0	0	Stottlemyre	P				
Siebert	P					Hamilton	P				
Dicken	PH	1	0	0	0	Boyer	PH	1	0	0	0
McDowell	P					Stafford	P				
Sims	C	5	0	0	0	Williams	P	1	0	0	0
Tiant	P	2	1	1	1	Howard	PH	1	0	0	0
Brown	2B/SS	3	0	0	0						

CLE	IP	H	R	BB	SO	NY	IP	H	R	BB	SO
Tiant	6	4	1	2	6	Bouton	3	3	1	0	3
John	2	2	0	0	2	Reniff	2	0	0	0	1
Siebert	3	1	0	0	3	Stottlemyre	1	1	0	0	1
McDowell - W	2	1	0	0	2	Hamilton	1	1	0	0	2
						Stafford	1	0	0	0	1
						Williams - L	5	5	1	2	1

Elvio Jimenez



Courtesy of TCMA Ltd.

## CHAPTER TWO FRANK VERDI (1953)

**F**rank Verdi is best remembered for his long and notable career as a minor league manager. Verdi managed in the minors for twenty-one seasons working in the Yankees, New York Mets, Houston Astros, and Baltimore Orioles organizations. He also coached in the Houston Astros, Minnesota Twins, and Washington Senators organizations and also served as a scout. In total, Verdi spent over fifty years in baseball. He was a successful minor league manager winning three International League championships (1969, 1970, and 1981). Before all of that, Frank Verdi was a *Least Among Them* player.

As we previously learned, as Elvio Jimenez was working his way up the minor league ladder, Verdi was struggling to hang on to his fleeting dream of once again reaching the big leagues. Of

course, he didn't make it back, and, in spite of his long and successful career as a minor league manager, he also never made it to the Major Leagues in that capacity either. Frank Verdi's long baseball life brought him only one day in The Show.

Frank Verdi graduated Boys High School in Brooklyn, New York in 1944. That same year, he began attending New York University, but he also received another call—to serve with the United States Navy in World War II. This author was unable to locate any of the specifics related to Verdi's service in the war. After the war, in 1946, Frank Verdi signed with the Yankees organization beginning his career in the minor leagues.

Frank Verdi's climb through the minors was slow, but steady. His first assignment in 1946 was with the D-Level Wellsville Yankees in the PONY (Pennsylvania-Ontario-New York) League. Verdi was fortunate that he was an able fielder as he hit only .239 in 106 games. Partially because he was known for his good glove, he was promoted for the last few weeks of the season to the Class-B Sunbury Yankees. 1947 saw Verdi spend time between the Butler Yankees (Class-C) and Sunbury. His .319 batting average with Butler indicated that he also had some promise with the bat.

By 1949, Frank Verdi was making a name for himself during his progression through the bush leagues. That year he successfully performed a play called the "hidden ball trick" seven times while playing for the Binghamton Yankees, an A-Level team. This trick play involves a fielder pretending to throw the ball to a teammate, usually the pitcher, to confound the base runner who then leaves the safety of the base, only to be tagged out by the fielder still holding the baseball. Of note, Future Hall of Famer Edward Charles "Whitey" Ford was a star pitcher with a 16-5 record for that same Binghamton team.

The Yankees organization seemed to have reluctant hope for Frank Verdi as an eventual Major Leaguer. In each of his minor league seasons, he was shuttled between various teams at various levels. With Binghamton again in 1952, Verdi hit .313 and was an All-Star as a third baseman in the Eastern League. That same year, Verdi had his first taste of Triple-A baseball as he was promoted to the Kansas City Blues at the end of the season.

And so it was, that in 1953, Frank Verdi was slated to begin

the season with the Syracuse Chiefs, the Yankees' top farm team. And then, better news! In May of that year Frank Verdi got the call to the majors.

Writers frequently refer to playing for the Yankees as "putting on the pinstripes." Unfortunately, for Frank Verdi, in his brief stay he didn't even get that opportunity. Verdi's lone Yankee appearance did not come at Yankee Stadium, rather it came in a rival city to the north, Boston. In Verdi's one Yankee game, he wore the road grays while playing at Fenway Park.

Among non-pitchers who had brief Major League careers, Frank Verdi's career must have been one of the shortest.

As the day began on May 10, 1953, the Yankees were sitting atop the American League with a 14-7 record. The Cleveland Indians were 12-6 and just a half game behind the Yankees. The Yankees' opponent on that day, the Boston Red Sox, were 11-9, two and one-half games off the pace. Sitting at the head of the American League was nothing new for these Yankees. They were baseball's best team in each of the previous four years, winning the World Series in 1949, 1950, 1951, and 1952. It was the desire, if not the expectation, of this team to win it all again in 1953. This squad was looking to become the first team ever to win five consecutive World Series. As such, every game, even against the



Courtesy of TCMA Ltd.

Red Sox, who were not necessarily a tough opponent at this time having finished the previous season at 76-78 in sixth place, mattered a great deal. (The 1953 Red Sox would eventually finish in fourth place with a respectable 84-69 record).

This game was the last of a three-game set in Boston. The Red Sox had won the Friday game 2-1, while the Yankees took the Saturday game 6-4 with the assistance of a two-run home run off the bat of Mickey Mantle. The Saturday event was also notable in that it was the

last game of Dominic DiMaggio's eleven-year playing career. (He appeared as a pinch hitter and popped out to second base.)

For this game, the Yankees sent a lineup that contained future Hall of Famers Phil Rizzuto at shortstop and Mickey Mantle in center field. Johnny Mize, another future Hall of Famer (at the tail end of his career) sat on the bench awaiting the moment when he might pinch hit. The Yankees manager was another eventual Hall of Famer, Casey Stengel. The Red Sox had George Kell, who would also be enshrined in Cooperstown, at third base. At this time, Ted Williams, their greatest player, was serving with the military fighting the war in Korea.

Frank Verdi's Major League opportunity came in the bottom of the sixth inning. On this day, the Yankees and the Red Sox were really battling. In the top of the sixth, with the Yankees trailing 3-2, Stengel sent Joe Collins in to pinch hit for Rizzuto. While Rizzuto was a star, Casey Stengel was known to pinch hit for him in close games. After Collins grounded out, Frank Verdi was sent into the game to replace Rizzuto at shortstop.

As he took the field for the bottom of the sixth inning, the players accompanying Verdi on the infield were Billy Martin at second base, Gil McDougald at third base, and Don Bollweg (a Yankee for but 70 games) was across the infield at first base. Vic Raschi, in relief of Allie Reynolds, was pitching.

The first batter for the Red Sox in the sixth inning was, Jimmy Piersall. He grounded out to McDougald at third. George Kell then flew out to Mickey Mantle in center field. Finally, Dick Gernert struck out to end the inning.

In the top of the seventh inning, the Yankees staged a rally. With two outs, Mantle singled. Gene Woodling followed Mantle's hit with a single of his own. Gil McDougald then singled home Mantle to tie the game at three. Following McDougald was Billy Martin who promptly hit a two-run double to give the Yankees the lead. The Yankees' catcher, Charlie Silvera, was then intentionally walked. Vic Raschi also walked to load the bases. It was just about time for Frank Verdi's first ever big league at-bat. But, just before he had this opportunity, the Red Sox manager, Hall of Famer Lou Boudreau, called for a pitching change. Stengel, not wishing to miss a chance to increase the Yankees' lead, then sent

for another rookie, Bill Renna, to pinch hit for Verdi.

Renna grounded out. And with that, Frank Verdi's Major League career was over.

Frank Verdi played shortstop for just one inning for the Yankees. He handled no chances. He never had an opportunity to bat. As Verdi recalled, "About a week later, I was in Syracuse."

In 1954, Verdi became the property of the Kansas City Athletics. He soon found himself playing for numerous organizations—the Chicago Cubs, St. Louis Cardinals, Washington Senators, and the New York Mets—all at Triple-A. He remained close to the big leagues, but he was never called up again.

On July 25, 1959, Frank Verdi, while serving as a player/coach of the Rochester Red Wings as part of the Cardinals organization, was actually shot while on the field of play in a game in Havana, Cuba. 1959 marked the year that Fidel Castro's overthrow of the government took place and he assumed power. At that time, the Havana Sugar Kings were part of the International League representing the Cincinnati Reds organization. A number of future Major League players were members of the 1959 Sugar Kings squad including future Yankee relief ace Luis Arroyo.

Before the game was played, there was an exhibition game featuring Castro's supporters competing against Cuba's military police. The stadium was filled with infantrymen. Fidel Castro even pitched two innings in that game exciting the crowd and helping to make for a tumultuous atmosphere.

The regularly scheduled game between the Red Wings and the Sugar Kings was a lengthy affair that lasted well into the night. As midnight struck, the crowd began to recognize the arrival of July 26, the date celebrated as the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. There was music and cheering... and gunfire. The players did not know why this spontaneous celebration erupted. Verdi remembered taking cover under a Jeep that was used to bring in relief pitchers. Order was eventually restored, and the game continued into extra innings, albeit with the players feeling the tension from the crowd and the game. During an argument with an umpire, the Red Wings' manager Cot Deal was ejected. As he left the field, he turned over his managerial duties to Frank Verdi.

The next inning, as Frank Verdi was standing in the third

base coach's box, gunfire again rang out. A stray .45-caliber bullet, hit Verdi in the head. Another bullet struck Cuban shortstop Leo Cardenas in the shoulder. As the umpires checked on Verdi and Cardenas, the game was immediately called, and the other players rushed off the field to safety.

In 1959, batting helmets were not yet in use, but some players, to offer protection to their heads, used plastic liners inside their baseball hats. Frank Verdi was one such player, having been beamed a few weeks earlier. On this fateful night, he had not removed the liner from his hat and the stray bullet glanced off that liner saving his life.

The next day, the Red Wings fled the island. During the 1960 season, the Havana team was moved to Jersey City, New Jersey. There has not been a minor league baseball team in Cuba since.

In 1961 and 1962, Frank Verdi served as a player/manager for the Syracuse Chiefs who were then affiliated with the Minnesota Twins. Verdi was transitioning from being a player to being a manager. During that 1962 season, Verdi was replaced as the manager and by the end of that 1962 season, Frank Verdi was back with the Yankees organization playing for the Double-A Amarillo Gold Sox of the Texas League. As Elvio Jimenez was working his way up for his one day in the majors, Verdi was barely holding onto his playing career from his only big league opportunity nine long years earlier. By 1963, Frank Verdi was a thirty-seven-year-old shortstop. He was assigned to the Greensboro Yankees in the Carolina League as a player/manager. Verdi was back in Single-A. After seven games in Greensboro, Verdi's playing days were over and his long and storied minor league managing career was beginning.

As a manager, Frank Verdi enjoyed a great deal of success. He managed in the minors for 24 years, including many years in the winter leagues, and had numerous first-place finishes and three minor league championships. In 1970, he was the Independent League's Manager of the Year.

After managing the Tidewater Tides for four years (1977-1980) for the New York Mets organization, Verdi returned to the Yankees and guided their Triple-A Columbus Clippers in 1981 and 1982 taking the Clippers to the postseason in 1981. In 1985,

Frank Verdi managed 139 games for the Rochester Red Wings in the Baltimore Orioles organization. That was his final year as a manager in affiliated minor league baseball but Verdi managed into the 1990s for independent minor league baseball teams. He once said, "This is a great game and it is in my blood. I can't leave it. Baseball's been good to me."

As he reached old age, Frank Verdi received numerous honors. In 1999 he was recognized in Syracuse and added to the franchise's Wall of Fame at P & C Stadium. Later, Frank Verdi was inducted into the Binghamton Baseball Shrine (2004) and reached the International League Hall of Fame in 2008.

## *Extra Innings*

### *The Story of Orlando “El Duque” Hernandez*

In the 1950s and 1960s, there were a number of legendary big league players who came from Cuba. This list includes Hall of Famer Tony Perez and a host of All-Stars including Minnie Minoso, Luis Tiant, Mike Cuellar, Bert Campaneris, and Tony Oliva. But in 1962, ballplayers in Cuba were forbidden to play baseball abroad. This led to a long period when Cuban baseball stars were not able to reach Major League Baseball. The only way for a Cuban player to make it to the baseball leagues in the United States was to defect. This did not happen often. Between 1963 and 1991, only one Major Leaguer, Barbaro Garbey, was able to leave Cuba and make it to the big leagues.

By the 1990s, due to Cuba’s struggling economy, more baseball players started to defect. These defections often put the lives of the ballplayers and their accomplices at great risk. One player who defected from Cuba during this time was one of Cuba’s greatest baseball stars, Orlando “El Duque” Hernandez.

A right-handed pitcher, El Duque was a star in Cuba who was also successful in international competitions. Hernandez pitched in the 1988, 1990, and 1994 World Cup competitions and was a member of the 1992 Cuban Olympic team. During his career in Cuba, El Duque won 126 games against only 47 losses for a winning percentage of .728, the highest of all time.

After his half-brother Livan Hernandez defected from Cuba, Orlando Hernandez was suspended and later banned for life from playing baseball in his homeland. He was reduced to living in poverty and working as laborer in a hospital.

On December 26, 1997 Orlando Hernandez and seven companions fled Cuba on a 21-foot fishing boat. They spent over ten hours at sea before landing on an uninhabited cay in the Bahamas where they lived on meager rations for three days before being

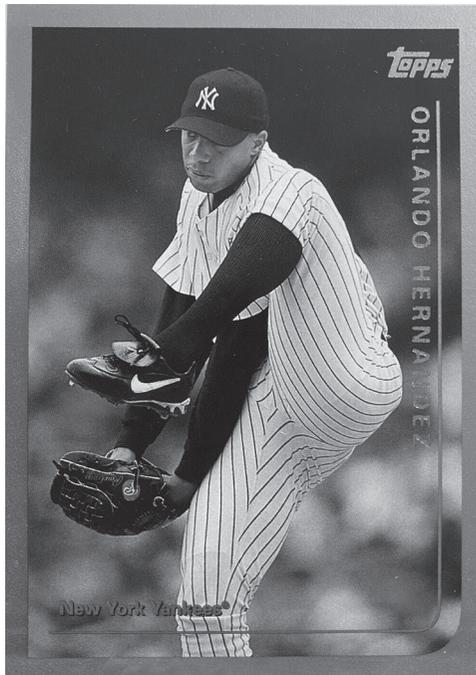
found by the United State Coast Guard. El Duque was granted a visa through Costa Rica and was then the subject of a great bidding war among numerous Major League clubs for his services. The New York Yankees prevailed and signed him for \$6.6 million.

Since El Duque had not pitched in over eighteen months, the Yankees sent him to the minors. Immediate positive results soon followed. El Duque went 7-1 in nine starts and he struck out 74 batters in just over 51 innings of work. By June, Orlando Hernandez was pitching in the majors. His success there was also immediate. For the 1998 Yankees, Hernandez went 12-4.

The 1998 Yankees dominated the American League with a 114-48 record. After their great regular season, though, they knew that the season would only be a success if they won the World Series. After sweeping the Texas Rangers in the American League Division Series, the Yankees found themselves on the verge of a crisis in the American League Championship Series against the Cleveland Indians.

After winning the first game, the Yankees dropped the next two to Cleveland, the same team that had defeated the Yankees in the American League Division Series the season before. History looked like it was on the verge of repeating itself.

On Saturday, October 10, 1998, Orlando “El Duque” Hernandez took the mound for the Yankees with their season basically on the line. El Duque had been a legendary “big game” pitcher in Cuba and now pitching what was considered a “must win” game for the Yankees, he did not disappoint. El Duque scattered three hits and no runs over seven innings propelling the Yankees to a 4-0



Courtesy of the Topps Company

victory that evened the series at two games. Following this victory, the Yankees won the remainder of their games, right through the World Series. In that World Series, Hernandez was the winning pitcher in Game 2.

All told, Hernandez pitched six seasons for the Yankees and had an impressive 61-40 overall record. In the postseason, he was even better. In fact, he was remarkable, winning his first eight decisions. El Duque was the MVP of the 1999 American League Championship Series.

After the 2002 season, injuries began to take a toll on El Duque. He finished his career pitching for the Chicago White Sox, Arizona Diamondbacks, and the New York Mets. He was an instrumental pitcher on the 2005 world-champion White Sox. El Duque retired with 95 Major League wins against just 65 losses. Between his Cuban career and the Major Leagues, Orlando Hernandez won 216 games with only 112 losses. His combined career, along with his dominating performances in the postseason, leaves little doubt that Orlando “El Duque” Hernandez was one of the greatest Cuban players to ever come to the Major Leagues.

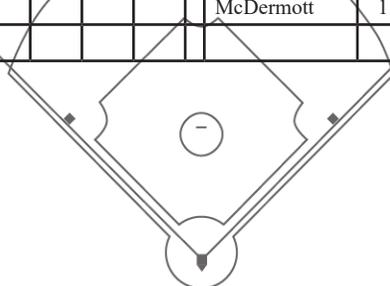
# NEW YORK YANKEES at BOSTON RED SOX

Sunday, May 10, 1953 (Fenway Park)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		R	H	E
<b>NY</b>	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	2	0		7	14	1
<b>BOS</b>	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0		4	10	1

NY		AB	R	H	RBI	BOS		AB	R	H	RBI
Rizzuto	SS	2	0	0	0	Goodman	2B	2	1	1	0
Collins	PH	1	0	0	0	Lepcio	PH/2B	2	0	0	0
<b>Verdi</b>	SS					Piersall	RF	4	0	1	1
Renna	PH	1	0	0	0	Kell	3B	4	0	2	0
Brideweser	SS	0	0	0	0	Gernert	1B	4	0	1	0
Noren	RF	4	2	2	0	White	C	4	1	1	1
Bollweg	1B	5	1	3	1	Stephens	LF	4	0	1	0
Mantle	CF	5	1	2	2	Umphlett	CF	4	1	1	0
Woodling	LF	5	1	1	0	Bolling	SS	3	0	1	1
McDougald	3B	5	2	2	1	Hudson	P	2	0	0	0
Martin	2B	5	0	3	2	Kinder	P				
Silvera	C	3	0	0	0	Holcombe	P	0	0	0	0
Reynolds	P	2	0	1	0	Kennedy	P				
Mize	PH	1	0	0	0	Wilber	PH	1	1	1	1
Raschi	P	1	0	0	0	McDermott	P	0	0	0	0

NY	IP	H	R	BB	SO	BOS	IP	H	R	BB	SO
Reynolds	5	7	3	0	0	Hudson - L	6.2	9	4	2	2
Raschi - W	4	3	1	0	1	Kinder	0	2	1	2	0
						Holcombe	0.1	3	2	0	0
						Kennedy	1	0	0	0	1
						McDermott	1	0	0	1	0



**Frank Verdi**