

Tony Kubek

Star of the Owensboro Oilers & New York Yankees

By Jerry Long
c.2025



1965 Topps baseball card

Anthony (“Tony”) Christopher Kubek (born October 12, 1935) is an American former professional baseball player and television broadcaster. During his nine-year playing career with the New York Yankees, Kubek played in six World Series in the late 1950s and early 1960s, starting in 37 World Series games. For NBC television, he later broadcast twelve World Series between 1968 and 1982, and fourteen League Championship Series between 1969 and 1989.

A left-handed batter, Kubek signed his first professional contract with the Yankees and rose rapidly through the team's farm system. He was 21 years old when he played his first game in Major League Baseball in 1957, and—except for one year (1962) spent largely in the U.S. military—remained with the Yankees until his retirement due to a back injury at the close of the 1965 season. In his prime he formed a top double play combination with second baseman (and roommate) Bobby Richardson on an infield that also featured third baseman Clete Boyer.

In 1957, Kubek won the American League Rookie of the Year Award. Kubek is one of five rookies to hit two home runs in a World Series game.

Kubek played 1,092 games, 882 of them at shortstop (although he also was an outfielder and utility infielder in his early career), compiling a lifetime batting average of .266 with 57 home runs. The 38 doubles he totaled in 1961 remained the Yankee club record for shortstops until 2004, and his career fielding percentage and range factor were both above league average. During his nine years with the Yankees, he played on seven American League pennant winners (1957–58, 1960–64) and three world champions (1958, 1961–1962).

Kubek retired from baseball on 25 January 1966. He became a color commentator on NBC's Saturday Game of the Week telecasts. He teamed with announcers – Jim Simpson, Curt Gowdy, Joe Garagiola, and Bob Costas. He spent 24 years at NBC, retiring from announcing on 16 September 1994. On December 22, 2008, Tony Kubek was named the recipient of the 2009 Ford C. Frick Award, an honor bestowed on a broadcaster for "major contributions to baseball" by the Baseball Hall of Fame.



Miller Field, at southwest corner of 18th & Triplett Streets in Owensboro, KY; operated from 1937-1955. Seating capacity was 5,000. Home of the “Owensboro Oilers”, a minor league professional team of the Kitty League; a farm club for several major league teams including the Yankees. Major league teams New York Yankees, Brooklyn Dodgers, Chicago White Sox, New York Giants and Pittsburgh Pirates played exhibition games here. Among the hall of famers who played here were Joe DiMaggio, Bob Feller, Mel Ott & Pee Wee Reese.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 4 May 1954, p.9:



The Skipper Speaks – Marv Crater, manager of the Oilers, talks to members of Kiwanis Club about his 1954 edition of the local ball club. Seated beside the manager are two of the Oilers' players, Tony Kubek, shortstop, center, and Vic' Caradonna, centerfield. Crater, who had no predictions, did say that the Oilers were not going to finish in the cellar again.



Owensboro Oilers 1954 team picture, Tony Kubek is the third from the left in the top row



Tony Kubek from 1954 Owensboro Oilers team picture



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 15 April 1957, p.10:

**Tony Kubek Signs
New York Contract**

NEW YORK (AP) – Tony Kubek, the rookie outfielder who has been outstanding in spring training, Sunday officially became a member of the New York Yankees when his contract was purchased from the Denver farm club.

Kubek, a left handed batter, hit .331 at Denver last year where he was a shortstop. Manager Casey Stengel has used Kubek in center and left field during the exhibition games. After an impressive start, Kubek's average has slipped in recent games and he was batting .267 before Sunday's game with Brooklyn.

The 20-year-old Milwaukee athlete has hit one homer during the spring and has driven in 16 runs. In St. Petersburg, Fla., the Yankee writers voted him the James P. Dawson award as the best rookie in camp.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 6 August 1957, p.6A:

IN THIS CORNER
with Russ Melvin

Sports Editor of the Messenger and Inquirer

Owensboro also gets mentioned several times in this week's edition of the Sporting News. .. The second main article in the paper concerns Tony Kubek who broke into pro ball with the Oilers in 1954. . . It tells about signing with the New York Yankees after being watched closely for several years. . . Marv Crater, who managed Tony when he was with the Oilers, also is mentioned.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 5 September 1957, p.12A:

ONCE MORE AROUND

By Merrill McCord, Sports Editor

Joseph Lee Sweeney, former living in New York City, recently sent Birdie Gasser a clipping from the New York Times concerning Tony Kubek, Yankee star who played for the Owensboro Oilers in the Kitty League in 1954.

The article, written by Joseph M. Sheehan, says Kubek is proof of the Yankee farm system fertility. T

“New striking evidence of the Yankee's genius far self-perpetuation at the top of the American League standing has been presented to the discouraged rivals of the Bombers,” says the article.

“The well-cultivated farm system that successfully grew Yogi Berra, Hank Bauer, Jerry Coleman, Whitey Ford, Mickey Mantle, Gil McDougald, Bob Grim, Tom Sturdivant, Johnny Kucks and Elston Howard to Stadium stature has supplied George Weiss and Casey Stengel with another prize bit of baseball product.

“The latest Yankee phenom is a tall, husky, jut-jawed blue-eyed blond out of Milwaukee who answers to the name of Tony Kubek. It's a cinch that this name will become well known to baseball fans.”

In most pre-season polls last, spring, Kubek was picked to be the rookie of the year. Thus far, he is living up to that honor.

Kubek is no home run slugger, but he is a good line driver and a resourceful hitter. For example, on July 27, he laid down an unplayable ninth-inning squeeze bunt which beat the Detroit Tigers.

As of August 28, the former Owensboro star was batting .296 to rank 13th in American League standings. He batted .344 for Owensboro in 1954 and .334 with Quincy the Three-I League in 1955. In 1956 he was assigned to Denver where he posted a .331 batting average.

Kubek has played at several positions for Manager Stengel this year and has displayed major league competence in all of them.

Continues Sheehans' article: “Kubek's versatility afield and at bat has endeared him to Stengel. The manager of the world champions likes nothing better than to have a full stock of interchangeable parts for his Yankee machine. Tony has developed into one of the most valuable items in Casey's kit.”



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 6 October 1957, pp.1A & 16A:

**Kubek, Former Owensboro
Oilers' Star, Hits Two Homers
As Yanks Whip Braves 12-3**

New York Takes 2-1 Lead Over Milwaukee;
Mantle, Aaron homer

MILWAUKEE (AP) – Tony Kubek, a 20-year-old Milwaukee boy, ruined his home town's first World Series game Saturday with two home runs in a sobering 12-3 New York Yankee victory over the Braves.

The rangy crewcut, who played five positions for the Yanks in his rookie year but hit only three homers in 127 games, drove in four runs with his two blasts into the right-field bleachers.

Mickey Mantle also deepened the gloom with his ninth series homer, a 400-foot drive into the bullpen after Kubek singled in the fourth inning.

Six Milwaukee pitchers, starting with Bob Buhl, eased the Yanks' way with 11 walks as New York took a 2-1 series lead by romping to this lopsided triumph in the third game of the best-of-seven competition.

It had been a cold, gray afternoon and the lights were burning through the heavy gloom when the 45,804 wandered out of County Stadium after the 3-hour, 18-minute marathon.

Henry Aaron, whose two-run homer rekindled hopes in the fifth by making the score 7-3, left eight Braves on base. The National League homer and runs-batted-in champ failed with three on in the second and sixth and two on in the first....

.... Kubek, whose father used to play ball for the Milwaukee Brewers in the American Association against Stengel's Toledo team, started this wild scoring sp'urge. | He hit Buhl's third pitch into the right-field seats in the very first inning....

.... The Yanks closed out their big afternoon with five runs in the seventh against Bob Trowbridge who had only his own wildness to blame. Walks to McDougald, Jerry Coleman and Larsen filled 'em up with one gone and Hank Bauer singled home the first two. Kubek's second homer of the day, deep into the bleachers, brought Larsen and Bauer romping in ahead of him....



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 8 November 1957, p.18:

**Kubek Unanimous Choice For
Rookie Of Year**
**Former Owensboro
Oiler Star Honored;
Sanford In National**

By Jack Hand

NEW YORK (AP) – Tony Kubek, the New York Yankees valuable Jack of all trades, and Jack Sanford, a 19-game winning pitcher and strikeout ace of the Philadelphia Phillies, are the 1957 major league Rookies-of-the-Year.

(Kubek formerly played with the Owensboro Oilers in the Kitty League).

A 24-man committee of the Baseball Writers Assn. composed of three from each league city, did the voting. The, results were announced Thursday.

Kubek won by a 23-0 landslide. The other ballot named Frank Malzone, Boston Red Sox third baseman, who previously had been declared ineligible because he had 103 at bats in a 1956 trial.



Tony Kubek

Sanford had more competition but the Phils' 28-year-old righthander won impressively. He got 17 votes. His closest rival was a teammate, first baseman Eddie Bouchee, who received four votes. Dick Drott, the Chicago Cubs' speedy righthander, had two votes and Bob Hazle, Milwaukee outfielder, one.

Kubek finished ninth among the league batters with a .297 average and at various times, manager Casey Stengel had Kubek, a Milwaukee resident, at shortstop, second base, third base, left field and center field. In the World Series he also alternated between outfield and infield.

Sanford returned from Army service in time to appear in three games with the Phils in late 1956 but not enough to keep him out of the 1957 rookie class. The 6-foot, 175-pound resident of Hatboro, Pa., finished with won-lost record and a 3.08 earned run average. He completed 33 starts and pitched three shutouts. Sanford, who had a 10-2 record at the time, was a member of the league's All-Star team and worked an inning in the game at St. Louis.



Tony Kubek with Yankees' manager, Casey Stengel



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 26 January 1966, p.8A:

“Man to Fan”

By Herb Parker, sports editor

Twelve years ago you could see the youngster was headed for the major leagues. He was a slender 17-year-old kid in a second hand Owensboro Oiler uniform. But he covered shortstop as if were his personal real estate and fielded as if there were a vacuum cleaner up his glove.

Tony Kubek first played baseball with the Oilers of the old Kitty League. He started here in 1954 with Marv Crater as his manager and moved up the baseball ladder faster than Arnold Palmer makes bank deposits. Following his tenure in Owensboro during which Kubek hit over .300, Tony moved to Quincy, Ill. of the Three-I League and then on to the Denver Bears of the American Association. In 1957, just three years after he had made his pro debut here, Kubek was with the Yankees.

One of the last times we talked to Tony he was discussing that 1957 season. Just few months after arriving in New York Kubek found himself playing in the World Series that produced his greatest "individual thrill". The big moment came when Tony, a native of Milwaukee, hit two home runs in one Series game at Milwaukee County Stadium.

The Yankees lost that Series, 4 games to 3, as Lew Burdette posted three victories and pitched 24 consecutive scoreless innings. But the next year Kubek experienced his greatest "team thrill" when the Yankees avenged that 1957 loss by beating the Braves in seven series games.

Kubek went on to win a host of honors. He played in and won more World Series, made numerous all-star teams and, before his multitude of injuries began, was hailed as baseball's best all-around shortstop.

And Tony Kubek was also one of baseball's best all-around men. Just this month he travelled to New York to receive a baseball writers' "Good Guy" award.

Yesterday Tony Kubek announced his retirement from baseball. He was "only" 29 but the repeated injuries had taken their toll.

It doesn't seem possible that a dozen years have passed and that Kubek has retired. I still remember the 17-year-old kid in an Owensboro Oiler uniform... Must be getting old.



**A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky,
Hugh O. Potter, Daviess County Historical Society, Owensboro, KY
(Montgomery, AL: Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, 1974) p.250:**

Anthony Christopher (Tony) Kubek, who capped nine outstanding years with the New York Yankees by becoming a baseball commentator for the NBC Television network, began his professional athletic career as a member of the 1954 Owensboro Oilers.

During his one year in the Kitty League, Kubek had a batting average of .344. In 1955, while with Quincy in the Ill League, his average was .334, and in 1956, with Denver in the American Association, his hitting averaged .331. The following season, in his fourth year in

organized baseball, Kubek became a member of the Yankees, where he played at shortstop, in the outfield and the infield until he brought his playing career to a close at the end of the 1965 season.

In nine seasons as a major leaguer, Kubek played in six World Series (1957, 1958, 1960, 1961, 1962 and 1963) and two All-Star games, in 1959 and 1961. He tied World Series records for the most times at bat, six times in a nine-inning game, on October 6, 1960 and again on October 9, 1961, and tied Series marks for the most assists as a shortstop, five in a four-game series, and for the most double plays started, three in a four game series in 1963. In his first year with the Yankees, he was named American League Rookie of the Year by the Sporting News.

Tony Kubek was born at Milwaukee, Wisc., on October 12, 1936 and was in his 18th year when he started his professional baseball career in Owensboro.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 13 April 1992, p.p1C & 3C:

Owensboro once in a league of its own
Kitty League's Oilers made home here until 1955

By Steve Vied, Messenger-Inquirer

The next time you are in the vicinity of 18th and Triplett, stop, get out of your car and listen closely. Perhaps, if you concentrate hard enough, and dream just a little, you will hear the crack of a bat, the roar of a crowd and the ump bellowing "Yrrrrrr out!" You might even catch the chant of the concessionaire hawking beer, or old Buck Abell ringing his cowbell.

Those faint echoes could come from only one place - long gone Miller Field, home of the Owensboro Oilers of the Class D Kitty League.

Miller Field, generally thought of as the finest baseball facility in the entire Kitty League, held its last Oilers game Aug. 23, 1955. A month later the graceful old park bit the dust, dismantled to make way for Gabe Fiorella's shopping center.

The Oilers won that final game, 5-4 over the Union City Dodgers. With that win, an era ended. Professional minor league baseball left Owensboro and has never returned. No longer could readers of the Messenger and Inquirer look forward each day to stories by sports editor Birdie Gasser reporting the exploits of the Oilers against the likes of the Paducah Chiefs, the Jackson (Tenn.) Generals, the Fulton Lookouts, the Mayfield Clothiers or the Hopkinsville Hoppers.

Nor would local fans ever again watch one of their very own Oilers progress to Major League stardom, like a Tony Kubek or a Chuck Tanner. Never again would the fans listen to the public address announcer thank Lloyd Terry, owner of Roy's Place, a nearby tavern, for turning off his neon sign just before the first pitch of every Oilers' night game. Terry graciously doused the sign each evening because it bothered the batters.

The Oilers played in Owensboro for 19 years, although games weren't played during the World War II years. The Kitty League was mostly a farm league for first- and second-year players. The Oilers were affiliated with the Boston Braves and later the team was supplied players by the New York Yankees.

The team was brought to Owensboro, lock, stock and barrel, in the middle of the 1936 season from Portageville, Mo., by several local businessmen and baseball fans, including J.C. Miller and James C. Ellis. Team player-manager Hugh Wise of the Boston Braves organization designed and built Miller Field, named after J.C. Miller. In his player-manager days, Wise's

dedication to the park was such that he was known to catch a doubleheader and then climb the light poles to adjust the lights before calling it a day.

Before Miller Field was built, the Oilers played home games at Southside Park, next to Legion Park. The tracks of the Owensboro street car system extended to the entrance of the park, although the city hadn't grown beyond 18th Street. The price of a one-way ticket from downtown to the Southside was a nickel, unless you bought six for a quarter.

Following a season and a half at Southside Park, the Oilers played their first game at Miller Field in 1938. A Major League exhibition game between the Cleveland Indians and the New York Giants was played at Miller Field that summer. Over the years Joe DiMaggio, Bob Feller, Mel Ott and Pee Wee Reese played at the park in exhibition games.

The Oilers won the Kitty League pennant in 1946 and again in 1949. Miller Field enjoyed strong attendance for most of the Oilers' existence until the club, and the league itself, began to lose steam in the early '50s. Television and radio broadcasts of major league games were blamed at the time for the lack of fan interest in Oilers' games. The Oilers lost \$24,500 in the 1951 and 1952 seasons. The team withdrew from the league in early 1953, but was later revived and enjoyed strong attendance that summer. But by 1955 the glory days of minor league baseball in Owensboro and a lot of other small cities had vanished.

What was it like to go to an Oilers' game? It sounds like fun.

Jack Hicks, a pretty fair baseball man himself and long-time coach of the Owensboro High School baseball team as well as the local American Legion squad, was the assistant scorer for the Oilers for a couple of years.

"They used to pack the place," Hicks said of local Oilers fans. "It was the best thing going around here. It was about all you could do on Sundays then. But the real excitement was the night games."

Hicks recalled that Abell, owner of a local moving and hauling business, kept the crowd alive by ringing his cowbell. Also doing his part to keep things lively was J.C. Miller, one of the owners. It was a tradition for Miller to throw his straw hat onto the field every time a player hit a home run, allowing the author of the blast to stomp it.

Ellis was also a big Oilers fan, in addition to being one of the money men behind the team. But Harold Mischel recalled that even though Ellis, an early riser, rarely missed a home game, he always left the park at 10 minutes before 10, "Even if the bases were loaded and the score was tied," Mischel said.

Mischel, who was involved in a successful effort to save the team from financial problems in 1953, said he picked up Kubek at the bus station when the 18-year-old Milwaukee native arrived in Owensboro the following spring.

"Kubek found an apartment on Bolivar Street," Mischel said. "The Yankees told me not to let him out of my sight because he would get homesick." Years later when Kubek was a star shortstop for the Yankees, he said Owensboro gave him the kind of start he needed.

Mischel said that future St. Louis Cardinals hall of famer Red Schoendienst was once a Kitty League second baseman and broke his leg at home plate at Miller Field. Tanner, who played for the Oilers in 1946 and managed the Pittsburgh Pirates to a world championship, was hit in the head by a ball at Miller Field and was operated on by local physician Dr. John S. Oldham.

Oilers fans were also fond of player-manager Earl Brown, a former major leaguer. Brown called the shots for the Oilers in 1946 and 1947. But perhaps his greatest contribution to the team was his bat. Brown hit .429 in '46, the highest batting average in all of minor league baseball, and

received a full-sized sterling silver bat from the Hillerich&Bradsby Co., maker of Louisville Slugger bats. Known for his home run power, Brown hit .424 in '47 at the age of 37.

In 1953 the Oilers were supplied with traveling uniforms worn by the 1949 world champion Yankees, including uniforms worn by manager Casey Stengel, Bill Dicky and Frankie Crosetti.

There are still plenty of Oilers memorabilia around. Until recently the Owensboro Area Museum displayed an Oilers uniform and other assorted items. When Miller field was taken down, Ellis moved some of the covered bleachers to Ellis Park in Henderson, where they are still in use along the stretch.

Tom Laswell, who spent several summers working at Miller Field, recalled that boxing matches were sometimes held at the park. Laswell remembered the Oilers drawing overflow crowds.

"The stands would be filled and there would be standing room in the outfield," Laswell said. "They would put ropes in the outfield and shorten the field 8 or 10 feet. If a player hit a ball into those people on the fly it was a home run."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 13 October 1994, p.8B:

Baseball's Blunt Broadcaster
Acerbic comments come to end as
Kubek closes television career

By Jack O'Connell, The Hartford Courant

When he retired as a player at age 29, Tony Kubek felt he had no choice. A chronic back ailment weakened his skills, and doctors told Kubek he had to quit playing baseball. When Kubek retired as a broadcaster last month at 57, the choice was clearly his.

The idea struck him May 2, an off day for the Yankees during their first West Coast trip this year. Kubek and his wife, Margaret, spent the day on a drive from Anaheim, Calif., through the San Bernardino Mountains, far from a television monitor and microphone.

"It was a great day. We had a lot of fun and I said to Margaret, 'I want to do more of this,'" Kubek recalled in a phone conversation recently from his summer home in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. "I still had another year on my contract with MSG, but I decided then that this would be my last year. I finally mentioned it to (Bob Gutkowski, then president of Madison Square Garden) in the parking lot at Yankee Stadium just before the strike. I told him, 'After 41 years, it's time.' Then I saw that he used my line, 'It's time,' when he was replaced at MSG.....

Kubek's decision to leave his \$500,000-a-year job ends a 28-year career as one of the keenest analysts in the game and certainly its bluntest. Unlike many broadcasters who rarely stray beyond the booth or the press dining room, Kubek engulfed himself in his work, prowling around batting cages, dugouts and clubhouses, gathering information by talking regularly with managers, coaches, players and umpires.

"I was a 162-game guy," said Kubek, who played for the Owensboro Oilers in the early 1950's. "I've always felt that was the way the job should be done, The viewer doesn't have the advantages I do, to be on the field and in the clubhouse before and after games. It was my job to relay to viewers what was going on as much as I could. I wanted to be a participant as a broadcaster."

Kubek succeeded. At one point during his years at NBC, Kubek interviewed pitchers in the bullpen, a practice baseball's management eventually halted. But Kubek continued to make his presence felt. He was in the visitors' dugout at Fenway Park, standing next to Sparky Anderson, then Cincinnati Reds manager, at the moment Boston Red Sox catcher Carlton Fisk hit the 12th-inning home run in Game 6 of the 1975 World Series.

"I was in the runway, and Sparky walked in, to sneak a smoke I guess; he was smoking in those days," Kubek said. "He went back to the edge of the dugout and motioned me to stand next to him. He asked his pitching coach how long Pat Darcy had been out there. When told it was Darcy's third inning, Sparky said to me, 'Uh-oh, that's the longest he's pitched all year.' He had barely gotten the word 'year' out when Fisk hit the home run. We had Sparky's immediate reaction on the air."

Another tough moment for Anderson's Reds was a shining one for Kubek. In the '72 World Series, Kubek's status as an analyst rose with his inquiry about a possible trick play. Reds catcher Johnny Bench was at bat against Oakland's Rollie Fingers with the potential tying run at third base and a runner on first with one out. When the runner at first, Bobby Tolan, stole second, A's manager Dick Williams visited the mound.

The count on Bench was 3-and-2, but the probability was that the A's would walk Bench intentionally to create a force at every base. Kubek, on the air, asked Monte Moore, the Oakland announcer who was handling the play-by-play, if the A's had a play by which a catcher would call for an intentional walk then quickly squat behind the plate to glove a pitch by a surprised batter.

Moore said he could not recall such a play as catcher Gene Tenace pointed to first base, indicating an intentional walk. Bench relaxed, resting his bat on his shoulder, where it remained as Tenace squatted to receive a belt-high strike three from Fingers, just as Kubek had explained.

"Sometimes you get lucky," Kubek said.

Talent as well as luck played into Kubek's success, which was remarkable for someone who entered the profession with very little apprenticeship. His playing career with the Yankees ended prematurely after the 1965 season, a year in which the Yankees went from first place to sixth as the dynasty began to crumble. Kubek had not played in the '64 World Series against the Cardinals because of a sprained right wrist, but it was his back condition that reduced Kubek, a career .266 hitter, to a ".218 hitter in 109 games in '65.

"The Army called me into active duty after the '61 World Series, and I hurt my back in the spring of '62 playing in a touch football game," Kubek said. "I had trouble with it off and on for a year or so, but in '65 the pain was unbearable. I found out I had three cracked vertebrae that hadn't healed properly. Doctors told me if I kept playing I could have permanent spinal damage. There was no decision to wrestle with. I had to quit. That was it."

Kubek, whose father had played minor league baseball in the 1940s, signed with the Yankees in 1953 and made the majors four years later. A favorite of manager Casey Stengel, who appreciated the Milwaukee native's versatility, Kubek was the American League rookie of the year in 1957 and was a four-time All-Star. No Yankees shortstop in the 30 seasons since Kubek left has been an All-Star. In Kubek's nine seasons with the Yankees, they reached the World Series seven times.

In his first World Series, in '57, Kubek hit two home runs in a game, the first time a rookie had done that. At the same ballpark, Milwaukee's County Stadium, 25 years later, the Cardinals' Willie McGee became the second rookie to homer twice in a World Series game, and Kubek was in the broadcast booth to witness it.

"The two-homer Series game has to be my biggest thrill," Kubek said. "It was in the first World Series game ever played in Milwaukee and the first time I was in a major league game in my hometown. But what I'll remember most was being a part of the '61 Yankees. Some people call that the greatest team ever. I don't know about that, but I know we were one of the best. Batting second every day in front of Roger (Maris) and Mickey (Mantle) that year is something I'll never forget."



NBC baseball sportscasters – on left Tony Kubek with Curt Gowdy and on right Tony Kubek with Joe Garagiola



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 18 August 1997, pp.1B & 3B:

'Summers Past'

Owensboro museum exhibit celebrates town's sporting history

By John Martin, Messenger-Inquirer

General admission tickets at Owensboro Oilers minor league baseball games were 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children.

But the team, which came to Owensboro in 1936 and left in 1955, swayed from that policy now and then. The family-friendly Oilers' unwritten rule, according to information at the Owensboro Area Museum of Science and History, was, "No boy was turned away for lack of a quarter."

A new museum exhibit titled "Summers Past" takes a look at the team and other Owensboro traditions. There's a bicycle from 1852, quilts and family photos. A turn-of-the-century photo shows a little boy motoring along on a pedal car that has lanterns for headlights.

Fashions of the past, such as a long summer dress from the early 1900s, are on display.

"It's a small exhibit, but it's really quite charming," said Madeline Oetinger, the museum's biologist and weekend supervisor.

Items in the exhibit mostly came from donations, Oetinger said. "Quite often people come in after they've been cleaning out an attic. They realize they have something of value and don't want to just throw it away."

The exhibit has items from the different periods of history. But much of it is devoted to the Oilers, who won pennants in the Class D Kitty League in 1946, 1947 and 1949.

There's a photo of Oilers' star Earl Brown, posing with his silver bat and new car, prizes won after his Kitty League batting championship in the late '40s.

There are white and gray uniforms with "Oilers" and "Owensboro" scripted across the front. Look carefully, and it's easy to imagine an Oiler legging out an infield hit or chasing a fly ball at Miller Field. And, there's a photo of Miller Field itself, the colorful home of the Oilers at 18th and Triplett streets. Named for J.C. Miller (who, along with James C. Ellis and other businessmen brought the Oilers to Owensboro), Miller Field had a covered grandstand behind home plate and bleachers down the foul lines. When the field was torn down, Ellis moved some of the bleachers to Ellis Park race course in Henderson.

In the team's early years, it was affiliated with the Boston Braves. Later, the Oilers fed players to the New York Yankees, among them shortstop Tony Kubek, who played on some Yankee World Series teams.

The Yankees once played an exhibition game in Owensboro, and Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio lamented that Miller Field was one of the finest minor league ballparks he'd ever seen.

One of Miller Field's many traditions, according to museum information, was its public address announcers' nightly acknowledgment of Roy's Place, a watering hole near the ballpark. Apparently, lights at Roy's sometimes glared into the batters' eyes, and the announcer was known to say, "We thank Roy's Place for turning out their lights."

Oetinger said the "Summers Past" exhibit will be on display until the end of September.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 6 August 2004, pp.1B & 5B:



By Steve Vied, Messenger-Inquirer

There's talk of professional baseball coming to Owensboro. Some folks want to build a nifty new park, where young men with strong arms and pop in their bats will hustle to impress somebody, anybody, for a chance to move up the ranks. Supporters say it will be a wonderful thing for the community.

Ellen Gilles isn't likely to disagree. Fifty years ago, her brief experience with professional baseball in Owensboro was nothing but positive.

In what turned out to be a magical summer of 1954, Gilles was landlady to four Owensboro Oilers, including future New York Yankees star Tony Kubek, 18 years old at the time. The players lived in rooms on the second floor of the Gilles family home at 522 Bolivar St. For those few months, the Gilles home was a magnet for all the neighborhood kids.

"They were really nice kids," Gilles said of the players. "But they had a whole lot more dates than I ever dreamed they had. All the time, I run into girls who said they dated them."

After the games at Miller Field, the players would often get home late and then have water fights in the back yard with a garden hose, Gilles said. Kubek, a Milwaukee native, went to Mass every day. Gilles made sure the other boys went on Sundays.

It wasn't at all unusual for Kubek and his teammates to throw the ball around with the kids, said Bob Gilles, Ellen Gilles' oldest child. Bob Gilles was 19 at the time and still living at home with his six siblings.

The players brought broken bats and baseballs home to the neighborhood kids, Bob Gilles said. A couple of screws and a little electrical tape made the bats good as new, he said.

"Every kid on the street had a bat," Bob Gilles said. Bob Gilles remembers the players' names -Kubek, Vic Spatafora, Mario Genovese and Bill Drummond. Later that summer, Bob Hantak lived with them, he said.

"It was fun," he said. "They were a great bunch of guys, and they fit in the neighborhood. Germantown was all Catholic."

Ellen Gilles said she wasn't in favor of renting rooms to the players at first. After all, her house was full. She and her late husband, Herman Joseph Gilles, and all their children lived there. But she relented.

"Their parents wanted them in a Catholic home and close to a church," she said.

Ellen Gilles' daughter Barbara Clark was 16 when the players lived in her house. On Tuesday nights ("Ladies Night") she made sure she went to Miller Field.

"There were teenage boys everywhere," she said. "I kinda enjoyed it."

Years later, Barbara attended a Yankees-Tigers game in Detroit, and Kubek not only remembered her but gave her a baseball signed by his teammates Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Whitey Ford and Bobby Richardson. Her brother Tom Gilles of Houston still has that baseball.

Ellen Gilles told the story of how Spatafora was told the team was letting him go.

"The boys came home, and they told me," she said. "They were going to let Vic go. I let him call his dad, and his dad came. Vic worked out a deal. He wanted to stay and play for free. He got a second chance, and he did all right. He just wasn't putting out 100 percent."

Ellen Gilles is 87 and moved from Bolivar Street years ago. But she still has a Louisville Slugger bat from that 1954 season. Not surprisingly, it's broken and repaired with screws and tape. On the barrel the name Berra can be made out. In '54, the Oilers were affiliated with the Yankees and by then Berra had been the Yanks' catcher for nearly eight years. It's no wonder Berra model Sluggers were making their way to Owensboro.

Ellen Gilles rented rooms to baseball players just that one year and went to Miller Field for one game the entire summer. By 1957 Kubek had begun his nine-season run with the Yankees, the final eight as shortstop.

The Kitty League Oilers played their last game at Miller Field Aug. 23, 1955. A month later the old park, considered the best in the league, was dismantled to make way for Gabe Fiorella's shopping center.

If pro baseball returns to Owensboro, Bob Gilles says he will be the first in line to buy a season ticket.

"I can't wait for it to happen," he said.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 21 September 2004, Connections pp.26 & 29:

Yankee star Kubek got his start in Owensboro

By Steve Vied, Messenger-Inquirer

Fifty years ago, Tony Kubek - future star shortstop for the New York Yankees during the team's glory days of Whitey Ford, Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris - was still a few years away from wearing the pinstripes of the Bronx Bombers.

That year, 1954, Kubek wore the uniform of the Owensboro Oilers, this city's Kitty League team that played games at long-gone Miller Field at 18th and Triplett streets.

The late Harold Mischel, who helped the minor league team stave off financial problems in 1953, once recalled his first encounter with the Milwaukee phenom.

Mischel said he picked up Kubek at the bus station when the 18-year-old arrived in Owensboro that spring.

"Kubek found an apartment on Bolivar Street," Mischel said. "The Yankees told me not to let him out of my sight because he would get homesick."

Years later, according to reports, Kubek said Owensboro gave him the kind of start he needed.

Newspaper accounts from that season attest to Kubek's talent. In game after game he was in the middle of the action, shining at the plate and on the infield, as often as not the star of the game.



Tony Kubek #10

Born Oct. 12 in Milwaukee, the 6-foot-3 Kubek didn't stay in the minor leagues long. He spent just that one season in Owensboro and then moved on to the Denver Bears. He was called up to join the Yankees in 1957, beginning a nine-year career.

Kubek was Rookie of the Year in '57 in the American League, batting .297 and playing several positions. In the third game of the 1957 World Series in front of his hometown fans in Milwaukee Kubek hit two home runs, the first time in his professional career he had two homers in one game.

The following year Kubek took over at shortstop for Gil McDougald. For eight seasons he and second baseman Bobby Richardson formed one of baseball's best double-play combinations.

In 1961, the year Roger Maris hit 61 home runs, Kubek broke the record for Yankees shortstops with 38 doubles. He would eventually appear in six World Series for New York.

Kubek batted .266 for his career in 1,092 games. His career was cut short by a neck and back condition. He went on to a long, successful career as a television broadcaster.

Kubek is remembered for being the victim of one of the most famous bad hops in Major League history. In the seventh game of the 1960 World Series at Forbes Field, a double-play ball

took an unexpected hop and hit Kubek in the throat, prolonging a five-run eighth inning for the Pittsburgh Pirates. In the bottom of the ninth, the Pirates Bill Mazeroski won the game and the series with a home run.

In his one summer in Owensboro, Kubek lived in an upstairs apartment at the home of Herman and Ellen Gilles at 522 Bolivar St. In addition to Kubek, Oilers Vic Spatafora, Mario Genovese, Bill Drummond and Bob Hantak lived upstairs in the Gilles house.

Ellen Gilles, now 87, said Kubek, a Catholic, went to Mass every day. The players enjoyed playing catch with neighborhood kids and supplied them with broken bats and baseballs.

Years later, Ellen Gilles' daughter Barbara Clark attended a Yankees-Tigers game in Detroit, and Kubek not only remembered her but gave her a baseball signed by Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Whitey Ford and Bobby Richardson.

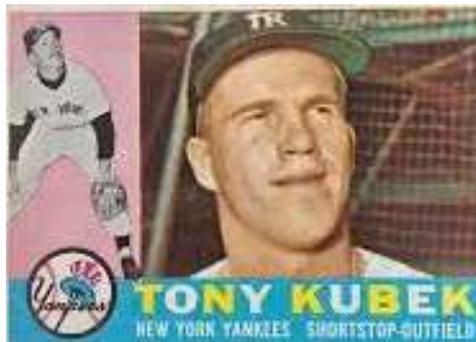
The Oilers played their last game at Miller Field on Aug. 23, 1955. A month later the old park, considered the best in the league, was dismantled to make way for Gabe Fiorella's shopping center.



Daviess County, Kentucky Celebrating Our Heritage, 1815-2015
(Evansville, IN, M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., 2015) p.14:

Daviess County Bicentennial Chronology:
200 Historical Events – By Jerry Long

1937, 5-20 Miller's Field, home of the Owensboro Oilers, minor league baseball team, is dedicated. A crowd of 3,000 witnessed the team's 4-3 victory over Union City, TN. The stadium was at the intersection of 18th & Triplett, where Gabe's shopping center is now. It was named in honor of Julius C. Miller, an Owensboro oil operator, who was the driving force behind bringing the Oilers to Owensboro and the construction of their home field. Several major league baseball teams played exhibition games here, one between the world champion Yankees & the Brooklyn Dodgers was witnessed by 7,500 in 1940. Several future major leaguers, including Tony Kubek & Chuck Tanner, played for the Oilers. The team folded at the end of the 1955 season and the last game was played there on 28 August 1955 and one month later the park was torn down.



1960 Topps baseball card