

## OBITUARIES

# Carl Scheib, Youngest Player in American League History, Dies at 91

By RICHARD GOLDSTEIN   APRIL 5, 2018

In the summer of 1942, Carl Scheib was working on his family's farm in Pennsylvania and anticipating another year in high school.

At age 15, he didn't have a car, but he did possess a nifty fastball and curve, pitching for his high school baseball team.

He had never seen a major league game, but even if he had ventured to Philadelphia to watch the Athletics or the Phillies play, there wasn't a lot to look at. Both teams had been in the doldrums for years, and baseball was beginning to lose ballplayers to military service in World War II.

Opportunity beckoned.

A salesman in his hometown, Gratz, Pa., happened to work as a part-time scout for the A's, and on his recommendation the team invited Carl to a workout at Shibe Park. Connie Mack, the A's president and manager, was impressed enough to ask him to come back the following summer.

Scheib dropped out of school for good in the spring of 1943 and became a batting-practice pitcher for the A's.

"I hate to say it, but being born and raised in Gratz, where you worked on farms, we didn't know about big league baseball," Scheib once told The Patriot-News of Harrisburg. "I thought they were crazy to pay you to play ball."

He made his major league debut on Sept. 6, 1943, relieving against the Yankees in the ninth inning of an 11-4 loss. He was 16 years, 8 months and 5 days old. In all, he got into six games that year, all in relief.

He pitched for the A's in all or parts of 11 seasons, but when he died on March 24 in San Antonio at 91, Scheib was most remembered for having been the youngest player in American League history.

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In fact, he was the youngest in all of modern I

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when he pitched his first game for the A's. But that distinction was erased when Joe Nuxhall pitched one-third of an inning for the National League's Cincinnati Reds in his major league debut on June 10, 1944, at the age of 15 years, 316 days. (Nuxhall went on to a long major league career, mostly with the Reds.)

Scheib, a right-hander, 6 feet 1 inches and 190 pounds, became a mainstay of the A's pitching staff as a starter and reliever and won 45 games for teams that were usually mediocre or worse.

His best season came in 1948, when he went 14-8 with a 3.94 earned run average and 15 complete games for an A's team that finished fourth in the American League with an 84-70 record, the franchise's best mark in his years with them. He also batted .298 that year, hit a pair of home runs along with eight doubles and three triples, and drove in 21 runs in 104 at-bats.

Carl Alvin Scheib was born in Gratz, a small town about 25 miles north of Harrisburg, on Jan. 1, 1927. He was one of four children of Oliver Scheib, a coal miner as well as a farmer, and the former Pauline Wolfgang.

Carl starred as a pitcher and outfielder for Gratz High School before making that barely imaginable leap to the major leagues.

He recalled that when he joined the Athletics, neither his teammates nor his coaches supplied advice.

"I was a shy, bashful kid," he told Jim Sargent in an interview for the Society for American Baseball Research more than 60 years later. "My parents drove me down and dropped me off in the big city of Philadelphia, and, hey, it was rough. I had to

find a restaurant to eat. I didn't even know how to read a menu. I had never been 50 miles from home. The Great Depression was just getting over, and our family never had the money to go anywhere or do anything."

Scheib pitched in 15 games for the Athletics in 1944 and in four games for them in 1945, all in relief, before being drafted into the Army that May. He pitched for an Army ball club that won the G.I. "World Series" of occupied Germany in September 1946, then returned to the A's in 1947.

Scheib was part of a rotation that included combat veterans like Phil Marchildon, who had been a gunner on a Canadian bomber and taken prisoner by the Germans when his plane was shot down; Lou Brissie, who wore a brace to protect a leg that had been shattered by a German shell during the Italian campaign; and Bob Savage, whose division had taken part in the liberation of a concentration camp.

Scheib saved 11 games in 1951 and posted an 11-7 record in 1952. After experiencing arm problems, he was sent to the St. Louis Cardinals early in May 1954. He pitched in three games for them before his major league career ended at age 27.

He had an overall record of 45-65 and a career batting average of .250.

After leaving baseball, Scheib retired to San Antonio and owned a service station and carwash.

Scheib's death, at a hospital, was confirmed by his family on Thursday. He is survived by his sons Kenneth and Carl Jr., his daughters Barbara McCauley and Sandy Pratt, six grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren.

Scheib's first wife, the former Georgene Umholtz, died in 1998, and his second wife, the former Sandra Lindinger, died in 2012.

Scheib returned to Gratz in 2005, the bicentennial of its founding, for a ceremony in which the community ballpark where he once pitched was renamed for him and a bronze plaque with his likeness was dedicated.

The small-town boy who had gone so far was awed by the tribute.

“Nobody knows what a man feels like when they put a monument up for him,” Scheib said. “I love this town, and I love the people in it.”

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