

# Don Meier, 90, was baseball aficionado, storyteller – did you hear about the time he held Ted Williams hitless?

By Christopher Burbach / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Friday, December 18, 2015 12:00 am

Don Meier's main claim to fame was holding Hall of Fame hitter Ted Williams hitless in a military baseball game during World War II.

And he was not shy about claiming it.

The moment in 1945 created a lifetime of material for Meier, an enthusiastic storyteller and baseball aficionado in the old-school tradition of his native South Omaha.

Joseph "Don" Meier spun that yarn and many others while selling elevators, drinking coffee with the guys after daily Mass at Mary Our Queen Catholic Church in west Omaha, meeting with fellow members of the Q Street Merchants Association in South Omaha, bowling in a Chamber of Commerce league and talking about the national pastime with fellow members of the Nebraska and Western Iowa Oldtimers Baseball Association.

You better believe the Ted Williams tale was in the lineup of stories told and retold at Meier's wake this week, after he died at age 90.

If anyone doubted it, they could read a military newspaper clipping in Meier's scrapbook — complete with the Boston Red Sox great's autograph and his written verification of Meier's story: "It's true!! Ted Williams."

"It wasn't that he was bragging. He was just proud of it and wanted people to know about it," Meier's daughter Sue Wilwerding said.

Meier grew up in the Riverview Park neighborhood, south of the future, and now former, site of



Don Meier

Don Meier pitched to Ted Williams in 1945. He is shown here with a picture of the young Williams, left, and a picture years later of the two of them together.

Rosenblatt Stadium.

He attended St. Rose Catholic Grade School. He graduated from South High School in 1943. He spent a lot of time at historic Brown Park, the storied and recently restored South Omaha ballfield. Meier played on a South High team that won a city baseball championship.

Meier joined the Navy after high school. He spent the war stateside, working on airplanes as an aviation machinist.

Williams was a pilot in the Marines Corps.

Their baseball paths crossed at an intramural military game in Florida.

A 6-foot-5 pitcher with a lively fastball, the former South High Packer played on a Navy team. One of baseball's all-time greatest sluggers, Williams by 1943 had hit 127 home runs and driven in 515 runs in his first four seasons in the Major Leagues.

Williams faced Meier in three at-bats. He came away with no hits, although Meier would later say one Williams fly-ball outs would have been a home run if there had been an outfield fence.

After the war Williams returned to the Red Sox. A 17-time All Star, he finished his career with a .344 lifetime batting average.

And after the war Meier played one year in the minor leagues. He pitched for the Class D Appleton (Wisconsin) Papermakers. He returned to Nebraska the next year and played one more season, with Columbus of the Pioneer Night League.

His fastball had lost some pop.

Meier attended Creighton University on the GI Bill, Wilwerding said. He earned a business degree.

Meier married his wife, Gloria, a Duchesne College alumna, in 1950.

He worked 34 years for O'Keefe Elevator Co., becoming its vice president in charge of sales. After retiring, Meier volunteered at Lauritzen Gardens, starting at the botanical gardens' beginning.

He was a familiar figure at meetings of the Omaha Oldtimers Baseball Club, which inducted him into its Hall of Fame in 2004, and the Nebraska and Iowa oldtimers association.

Asked about Meier Wednesday, club member John Stella said, "Oh, sure, I know him. Didn't he pitch to Ted Williams once or something?"

Hearing about that made Wilwerding laugh.

"He told that story to EVERYBODY," she said. "He was very outgoing. He loved people, loved having

fun. I never heard anybody say anything bad about him. And I never heard him say anything bad about anybody.”

In addition to his wife and Wilwerding, Meier is survived by daughter Barb Cunningham.

Funeral services were Tuesday at Mary Our Queen.