

= Bill Virdon =

William Charles Virdon ( born June 9 , 1931 ) is an American former professional baseball outfielder , manager , and coach in Major League Baseball ( MLB ) . Virdon played in MLB for the St. Louis Cardinals and Pittsburgh Pirates from 1955 through 1965 and in 1968 . He served as a coach for the Pirates and Houston Astros , and managed the Pirates , Astros , New York Yankees , and Montreal Expos .

After playing in Minor League Baseball for the Yankees organization , Virdon was traded to the Cardinals , and he made his MLB debut in 1955 . That year , Virdon won the National League Rookie of the Year Award . He slumped at the beginning of the 1956 season , and was traded to the Pirates , where he spent the remainder of his playing career . A premier defensive outfielder during his playing days as a center fielder for the Cardinals and Pirates , Virdon led a strong defensive team to the 1960 World Series championship . In 1962 , Virdon won a Rawlings Gold Glove Award . Following the 1965 season , he retired due to his desire to become a manager .

Virdon managed in Minor League Baseball until returning to the Pirates as a coach in 1968 . He served as manager of the Pirates in 1972 and 1973 , before becoming the manager of the Yankees in 1974 . During the 1975 season , the Yankees fired Virdon , and he was hired by the Astros . After being fired by the Astros after the 1982 season , Virdon managed the Expos in 1983 and 1984 . Virdon won The Sporting News ' Manager of the Year Award in 1974 , his only full season working for the Yankees , and in 1980 , while managing the Astros . He returned to the Pirates as a coach following his managerial career , and remains with the Pirates as a guest instructor during spring training .

= = Early life = =

William Charles Virdon was born in Hazel Park , Michigan , on June 9 , 1931 . His parents , Bertha and Charles Virdon , were originally from Missouri , but moved to Hazel Park during the Great Depression , where they were able to find jobs in automotive factories . When he was 12 years old , his family moved to West Plains , Missouri .

Virdon attended West Plains High School . He competed in American football , basketball , and track and field for the school . As West Plains did not compete in baseball , Virdon traveled to Clay Center , Kansas , to play for their American Amateur Baseball Congress team as a center fielder and shortstop . He enrolled at Drury University in Springfield , Missouri .

= = Professional career = =

= = = Playing career = = =

= = = = Minor league career = = = =

Virdon attended an open tryout held by the New York Yankees in Branson , Missouri , and scout Tom Greenwade signed Virdon to the Yankees for a \$ 1 @ , @ 800 signing bonus ( \$ 17 @ , @ 704 in current dollar terms ) . Virdon made his professional debut in 1950 with the Independence Yankees in the Class D Kansas ? Oklahoma ? Missouri League , and was promoted to the Kansas City Blues in the Class AAA American Association for the final 14 games of the season . Virdon played for the Norfolk Tars in the Class B Piedmont League in 1951 , and for the Binghamton Triplets in the Class A Eastern League in 1952 . The Yankees assigned him to Kansas City in 1953 , but he struggled , batting .233 . While he played in Kansas City , Virdon was diagnosed with astigmatism . When Kansas City manager Harry Craft noticed Virdon reading while wearing glasses , Craft told him to wear them while he played .

The Yankees demoted Virdon to the Birmingham Barons in the Class AA Southern Association . In

42 games for Birmingham , Virdon had a .317 batting average . According to Hal Smith , his roommate with Birmingham , Virdon changed his approach to hitting , prioritizing line drives to all parts of the field , rather than trying to hit for power .

Virdon remained stuck behind Mickey Mantle on the Yankees ' depth chart for center field , while Gene Woodling and Hank Bauer played the corner outfield positions . The Yankees traded Virdon to the St. Louis Cardinals before the 1954 season with Mel Wright and Emil Teller for veteran outfielder and All @-@ Star Enos Slaughter . Virdon struggled during spring training , and Cardinals manager Eddie Stanky worked with Virdon to improve his hitting . The Cardinals assigned Virdon to the Rochester Red Wings of the Class AAA International League for the season . He led the league with a .333 batting average and hit 22 home runs , finishing second in voting for the International League Most Valuable Player Award to Elston Howard .

= = = Major league career = = =

Virdon joined the Cardinals in 1955 , as the Cardinals moved Stan Musial to first base to allow Virdon to play the outfield . As a rookie , Virdon had a .281 average with 17 home runs and 69 runs batted in ( RBIs ) . He was named the winner of the National League ( NL ) Rookie of the Year Award , voted on by the Baseball Writers ' Association of America , beating Jack Meyer of the Philadelphia Phillies .

After the 1955 season , the Cardinals hired Frank Lane , nicknamed " The Trader " , as their general manager . Virdon slumped to begin the 1956 season , and the Cardinals traded him to the Pittsburgh Pirates in May 1956 for Bobby Del Greco and Dick Littlefield . Lane claimed that Virdon 's late season slump in 1955 was because he tired down the stretch , and that is why he chose to trade him . Lane later referred to the trade as " the worst trade [ he ] ever made " .

When he arrived at Pittsburgh , he developed an eye condition , for which he received treatment , missing one week of the season . Virdon 's vision improved , and he challenged Hank Aaron for the NL batting title . Virdon batted .334 for the Pirates during remainder of the season , which increased his season batting average to .319 , second @-@ best in the NL to Aaron , who batted .328 . Pirates ' announcer Bob Prince gave Virdon the nickname " Quail " due to the frequency of his soft @-@ hit infield hits .

The Pirates hired Danny Murtaugh as their manager during the 1957 season ; Virdon credited Murtaugh with pushing him to perform at his best . Virdon consistently batted in the .260s for the next several seasons . He led all NL center fielders in assists in 1959 with 16 , and in double plays turned with five . In 1960 , Virdon , along with right fielder Roberto Clemente , shortstop Dick Groat , second baseman Bill Mazeroski , and third baseman Don Hoak , formed a strong defensive unit for the Pirates , and they reached the 1960 World Series , where they faced the New York Yankees . Virdon batted .241 during the seven game series . In the deciding Game 7 , he hit a ground ball that struck Yankees shortstop Tony Kubek in the throat after taking an unpredictable bounce , enabling Virdon to reach base safely . This started a rally for the Pirates that culminated in Bill Mazeroski 's home run that won the series for Pittsburgh .

Virdon led the NL in triples with 10 during the 1962 season . That year , he won the Rawlings Gold Glove Award . He struggled in the 1964 season , batting only .243 . Though his batting average improved to .279 in the 1965 season , Virdon retired after the season due to his desire to become a manager . Virdon retired with 1 @,@ 596 MLB hits , a career batting average of .267 with 91 home runs during his 1 @,@ 583 @-@ game NL career .

= = = Coaching and managing = = =

Virdon began operating a baseball academy in 1956 . After the 1962 season , Virdon coached in the Arizona Instructional League . He coached in the Florida Instructional League following the 1964 season . Following his retirement as a player after the 1965 season , Virdon spent the next two seasons as a manager in the minor leagues for the New York Mets ' organization . In 1966 , he managed the Williamsport Mets of the Eastern League , and in 1967 , he managed the Jacksonville

Suns of the International League . He led Williamsport to a 68 ? 72 win @-@ loss record , and Jacksonville to a 66 ? 73 record .

Viridon joined the Pirates ' major league coaching staff under manager Larry Shepard in 1968 . Shepard left the Pirates after the 1969 season , and Viridon interviewed to become the Pirates ' next manager . However , the Pirates re @-@ hired Murtaugh , and Viridon remained on Murtaugh 's coaching staff . Viridon coached the Pirates as they won the 1971 World Series . Due to health problems , Murtaugh retired after the 1971 season , and Viridon was named as his successor .

As a manager , Viridon led the Pirates to the 1972 NL East division title , but the Pirates lost the 1972 National League Championship Series ( NLCS ) to the Cincinnati Reds when Pittsburgh pitcher Bob Moose unleashed a wild pitch in the final inning of Game 5 , allowing the winning run to score . The 1973 Pirates had to play without Clemente , who died during the previous offseason . Further struggles included pitcher Steve Blass ' inability to throw strikes and injuries to Dock Ellis . In 1973 , Viridon clashed with Ellis and Richie Hebner , and the Pirates fell into third place , with a 67 ? 69 record , and the team fired Viridon , replacing him with Murtaugh .

The Yankees announced the hiring of Dick Williams as their manager for the 1974 season , but American League president Joe Cronin nullified the transaction because Williams was still under contract with the Oakland Athletics . The Athletics demanded prospects Otto Velez and Scott McGregor as compensation for Williams , but the Yankees decided the price was too steep . Without a manager , the Yankees hired Viridon , signing him to a one @-@ year contract . Viridon led the Yankees to a competitive finish , one game behind the Baltimore Orioles in the American League East division . He won The Sporting News ' Manager of the Year Award . The Yankees signed him to a two @-@ year contract after the 1974 season , with a raise from \$ 50 @, @ 000 to \$ 65 @, @ 000 per year . However , Viridon clashed with Bobby Murcer . He received a death threat due to his preference of playing Elliott Maddox over Murcer in center field . The Yankees struggled in 1975 . When Billy Martin was fired as manager of the Texas Rangers during the 1975 season , the Yankees fired Viridon on August 2 and hired Martin .

The Houston Astros hired Viridon as their manager on August 20 , 1975 , succeeding Preston Gómez . Tal Smith , who had served as executive vice president for the Yankees , had become the Astros ' general manager on August 7 . Viridon led the Astros to third @-@ place finishes in 1976 and 1977 , but the Astros slipped to fifth place in 1978 . The 1979 Astros fell one game short of winning the NL West division championship . The Astros tied the Los Angeles Dodgers for the division championship in 1980 , and defeated them in the 1980 NL West tie @-@ breaker game . The Astros played the Philadelphia Phillies in the 1980 NLCS , losing the series in five games . He again won the Manager of the Year Award in 1980 . Due to the 1981 Major League Baseball strike , the 1981 season was split into halves with each half 's winner appearing in the 1981 NL Division Series . The Dodgers won the first half , while the Astros won the second . In the Division Series , the Dodgers defeated the Astros in five games . During the 1982 season , the Astros fell to fifth place . Viridon was fired during the season and replaced by Bob Lillis .

The Montreal Expos hired Viridon as their manager before the 1983 season , replacing Jim Fanning , and signed a two @-@ year contract . During the 1984 season , Viridon expressed his to Expos general manager John McHale that he did not want to return to the Expos in 1985 . With a 64 ? 67 record in August 1984 , the Expos fired Viridon during the 1984 season , replacing him with Fanning . Gary Lucas , a pitcher for the Expos , felt that they had lost many one @-@ run games because Viridon was too conservative in his managing , not employing the hit and run play and relying on the starting pitcher for long in the game .

Viridon returned to the Pirates as the hitting coach under Jim Leyland in 1986 , Leyland 's first season as a manager . He took the position only when he was convinced that he would not succeed Leyland should the Pirates fire him . Following a contract dispute , the Pirates replaced Viridon with Milt May before the 1987 season . Viridon remained with the Pirates as a minor league hitting instructor for the Pirates from 1987 through 1989 . He worked as a spring training instructor for the Cardinals in 1990 and 1991 , and then rejoined Leyland 's coaching staff in Pittsburgh in 1992 .

With Major League Baseball expanding by two teams for the 1993 season , Viridon interviewed for the managerial positions of both expansion teams , the Florida Marlins and the Colorado Rockies ,

in 1992 . The Marlins instead hired Rene Lachemann , and the Rockies hired Don Baylor . In 1994 , Virdon interviewed with the Orioles for their vacant managerial position . Virdon left the Pirates after the 1995 season . He became the bench coach for the Astros under first @-@ time manager Larry Dierker in 1997 . The Pirates brought Virdon back as their bench coach for the 2001 season under first @-@ time manager Lloyd McClendon . He retired from coaching after the 2002 season .

Virdon 's career managerial record , over all or parts of 13 seasons , was 995 ? 921 ( .519 ) . He also managed in the minor leagues for the Cardinals and the Astros . In June 2012 , the Pirates attempted to add Virdon and Mazerowski to their coaching staff , but were rebuffed by MLB for violating the rules on uniformed coaching staffs after one game . Virdon continues to serve as a special outfield instructor for the Pirates during spring training .

= = Personal life = =

Virdon and his wife , Shirley , married in November 1951 , and live in Springfield , Missouri . They have three daughters . Together , Bill and Shirley Virdon endowed two scholarships at Southeast Missouri State University , Shirley 's alma mater , with one specifically devoted for a baseball player .

A portion of the U.S. Route 63 business route in West Plains is named " Bill Virdon Boulevard " . Virdon was inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame in 1983 , and named a Missouri Sports Legend by the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame in 2012 . The Independence , Missouri , Baseball Hall of Fame inducted Virdon in 2013 . Following Whitey Herzog 's election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 2012 , Herzog indicated that he would champion Virdon 's cause to the Veterans Committee in future elections .