

= Ernie Banks =

Ernest " Ernie " Banks (January 31 , 1931 ? January 23 , 2015) , nicknamed " Mr. Cub " and " Mr. Sunshine " , was an American professional baseball player who played in Major League Baseball (MLB) as a shortstop and first baseman for the Chicago Cubs between 1953 and 1971 . He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1977 , and was named to the Major League Baseball All @-@ Century Team in 1999 .

Banks is regarded by some as one of the greatest players of all time . He began playing professional baseball in 1950 with the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro leagues . He served in the U.S. military for two years , played for the Monarchs again , and began his major league career in September 1953 . The following year , Banks was the National League Rookie of the Year runner @-@ up . Beginning in 1955 , Banks was a National League (NL) All @-@ Star for 11 seasons , playing in 13 of the 15 All @-@ Star Games held during those seasons . Banks was the Cubs ' main attraction in the late 1950s , the National League Most Valuable Player in 1958 and 1959 , and the Cubs ' first Gold Glove winner in 1960 .

In 1962 , Banks became a regular first baseman for the Cubs . In the mid @-@ 1960s , Cubs manager Leo Durocher became frustrated with Banks , saying the slugger 's performance was faltering . Durocher said he was unable to remove Banks from the lineup due to the star 's popularity among Cubs fans . Between 1967 and 1971 , he was a player @-@ coach . In 1969 , through a Chicago Sun @-@ Times fan poll , Cubs fans voted him the greatest Cub ever . In 1970 , Banks hit his 500th career home run at Wrigley Field . He retired from playing in 1971 , was a coach for the Cubs in 1972 , and in 1982 was the team 's first player to have his uniform number retired .

Banks was active in the Chicago community during and after his tenure with the Cubs . He founded a charitable organization , became the first black Ford Motor Company dealer in the United States , and made an unsuccessful bid for a local political office . In 2013 , Banks was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his contribution to sports . Banks lived in the Los Angeles and Chicago areas .

= = Early life = =

Banks was born in Dallas , Texas , to Eddie and Essie Banks on January 31 , 1931 ; he was the second of twelve children . His father , who had worked in construction and was a warehouse loader for a grocery chain , played baseball for black , semi @-@ professional teams in Texas . As a child , Banks was not very interested in baseball , preferring swimming , basketball and football . His father bought Ernest a baseball glove for less than three dollars at a five and dime store and motivated Banks with nickels and dimes to play catch . Banks 's mother encouraged him to follow one of his grandfathers into a career as a minister .

Banks graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1950 . He lettered in basketball , football and track . Banks ' school did not have a baseball team ; he played fastpitch softball for a church team during the summer . He was also a member of the Amarillo Colts , a semi @-@ professional baseball team . History professor Timothy Gilfoyle wrote that Banks ' talent for baseball was discovered by Bill Blair , a family friend who scouted for the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro American League . Other sources say Banks was noticed by Cool Papa Bell of the Monarchs .

In 1951 , Banks was drafted into the U.S. Army and served in Germany during the Korean War . He served as a flag bearer in the 45th Anti @-@ Aircraft Artillery Battalion at Fort Bliss , where he played with the Harlem Globetrotters on a part @-@ time basis . In 1953 , he was discharged from the army and joined the Monarchs for the remainder of that season , achieving a .347 batting average . Banks later said , " Playing for the Kansas City Monarchs was like my school , my learning , my world . It was my whole life . "

= = MLB career = =

=== Early career ===

Banks signed with the Chicago Cubs in late 1953 , making his major league debut on September 17 at age 22 and playing in 10 games at Wrigley Field . He was the Cubs ' first black player ; he became one of several former Negro league players who joined MLB teams without playing in the minor leagues . Larry Moffi and Jonathan Kronstadt wrote that he " just was not the crusading type . He was so grateful to be playing baseball for a living , he did not have time to change the world , and if that meant some people called him an Uncle Tom , well , so be it . "

During his first game for the Cubs , Banks received a visit from Jackie Robinson that influenced his quiet presence in baseball . Robinson told Banks , " Ernie , I 'm glad to see you 're up here so now just listen and learn ... For years , I didn 't talk and learned a lot about people " . Later , when Banks felt like becoming more vocal , he discussed the issue with teammate Billy Williams , who advised him to remain quiet . Williams drew the analogy of fish that are caught once they open their mouths . Banks said , " I kept my mouth shut but tried to make a difference . My whole life , I 've just wanted to make people better " .

In 1954 , Banks ' double play partner during his official rookie season was Gene Baker , the Cubs ' second black player . Banks and Baker roomed together on road trips and became the first all @-@ black double @-@ play combination in major league history . When Steve Bilko played first base , Cubs announcer Bert Wilson referred to the Banks @-@ Baker @-@ Bilko double play combination as " Bingo to Bango to Bilko " . Banks hit 19 home runs and finished second to Wally Moon in Rookie of the Year voting . Banks participated in a trend toward lighter baseball bats after he accidentally picked up a teammate 's bat and liked that it was easy to generate bat speed .

In 1955 , Banks hit 44 home runs , had 117 RBI and batted .295 . He played and was the starting NL shortstop in his first of 13 All @-@ Star Games that season . His home run total was a single @-@ season record among shortstops . He also set a thirty @-@ year record of five single @-@ season grand slam home runs . Banks finished third in 1955 in the league 's Most Valuable Player (MVP) voting , behind Roy Campanella and Duke Snider . The Cubs finished with a 72 ? 81 win @-@ loss record , winning 29 of 77 road games . In 1956 , Banks missed 18 games due to a hand infection , breaking his run of 424 consecutive games played . He finished the season with 28 home runs , 85 RBIs , and a .297 batting average . He made the All @-@ Star selection as a reserve player but did not play in the game . In 1957 , Banks finished the season with 43 home runs , 102 RBI , and a .285 batting average .

In 1958 and 1959 , Banks became the first NL player to be awarded back @-@ to @-@ back NL MVP Awards . He hit .313 and led the major league and NL with 47 HR in 1958 . The following year , he hit .304 with 45 HR , and was the NL RBI leader with 129 and 143 RBI in both of those seasons . In 1959 , the Cubs came the closest to a winning season since Banks ' arrival , finishing with a 74 ? 80 record .

In 1960 , Banks hit a major league and NL @-@ leading 41 HR , had 117 RBI , and led the NL in games played for the sixth time in seven years . He was also the first Cubs player to receive an annual NL Gold Glove award (for shortstop) . On the eve of the 1960 World Series , Joe Reichler , a writer for the Associated Press , reported that the Milwaukee Braves were prepared to pay cash and trade pitchers Joey Jay , Carlton Willey and Don Nottebart , outfielder Billy Bruton , shortstop Johnny Logan and first baseman Frank Torre in exchange for Banks from the Cubs .

=== Move to first base ===

In 1961 , Banks experienced problems with a knee injury he had acquired while in the army . After 717 consecutive games , he removed himself from the Cubs lineup for at least four games , ending his pursuit of the record for playing in the most consecutive NL games of 895 games set by Stan Musial . In May , the Cubs announced that Jerry Kindall would replace Banks at shortstop and that Banks would move to left field . Banks later said , " Only a duck out of water could have shared my loneliness in left field " . Banks credited center fielder Richie Ashburn with helping him learn to play left field ; in 23 games Banks committed only one error . In June , he was moved to first base ,

learning that position from former first baseman and Cubs coach Charlie Grimm . He was not selected to be an All @-@ Star for the first of two All @-@ Star games that season since 1959 , when MLB started having two All @-@ Star Games per season through 1962 , but was selected as a reserve player . Banks was a pinch hitter in the second All @-@ Star game .

The Cubs began playing under the College of Coaches in 1961 , a system in which decisions were made by a group of 12 coaches rather than by one manager . By the 1962 season , Banks hoped to return to shortstop but the College of Coaches had determined that he would remain at first base indefinitely . In May 1962 , Banks was hit in the head by a fastball from former Cubs pitcher Moe Drabowsky and was taken off the field unconscious . He sustained a concussion , spent two nights in a hospital , sat out a Monday game , and hit three home runs and a double on Tuesday .

In May 1963 , Banks set a single @-@ game record of 22 putouts by a first baseman . However , he caught mumps that year and finished the season with 18 home runs , 64 RBI , and a .227 batting average . Despite Banks ' struggles that season , the Cubs had their first winning record since the 1940s . Banks , following his doctor 's orders , avoided his usual off @-@ season participation in handball and basketball , and began the 1964 season weighing seven pounds (3 @. @ 2 kg) more than the previous year . In February , Cubs second baseman Ken Hubbs was killed in an airplane crash . Banks finished the season with 23 home runs , 95 RBI , and a .264 batting average . The Cubs finished in eighth place in 1964 , losing over \$ 315 @, @ 000 . In 1965 , Banks hit 28 home runs , had 107 RBI , a .265 batting average , and played and started at first base in the All @-@ Star Game . On September 2 , he hit his 400th home run . The Cubs finished the season with a baseball operations deficit of \$ 1 @. @ 2 million , though this was largely offset by television and radio revenue , and the rental of Wrigley Field to the Chicago Bears football team .

The Cubs hired Leo Durocher as manager in 1966 , hoping he could inspire renewed interest in the team 's fan base . Banks hit only 15 home runs ; Cubs finished the 1966 season in last place with a 59 ? 103 win @-@ loss record , the worst season of Durocher 's career . From the time Durocher arrived in Chicago , he was frustrated at his inability to trade or bench the aging Banks . In Durocher 's autobiography , he says :

... [Banks] was a great player in his time . Unfortunately , his time wasn 't my time . Even more unfortunately , there was not a thing I could do about it . He couldn 't run , he couldn 't field ; toward the end , he couldn 't even hit . There are some players who instinctively do the right thing on the base paths . Ernie had an unfailing instinct for doing the wrong thing . But I had to play him . Had to play the man or there would have been a revolution in the street . "

Banks said of Durocher , " I wish there had been someone around like him early in my career ... He 's made me go for that little extra needed to win " . Durocher served as Cubs manager until mid @-@ 1972 , the season after Banks retired . In his memoir Mr. Cub , published around the time that Banks retired , Banks said too much had been made of the racial implications in his relationship with Durocher ; ; he said :

My philosophy about race relations is that I 'm the man and I 'll set my own patterns in life . I don 't rely on anyone else 's opinions . I look at a man as a human being ; I don 't care about his color . Some people feel that because you are black you will never be treated fairly , and that you should voice your opinions , be militant about them . I don 't feel this way . You can 't convince a fool against his will ... If a man doesn 't like me because I 'm black , that 's fine . I 'll just go elsewhere , but I 'm not going to let him change my life .

The Cubs appointed Banks a player @-@ coach for the 1967 season . Banks competed with John Boccabella for a starting position at first base . Shortly after , Durocher named Banks the outright starter at first base . Banks hit 23 home runs and drove in 95 runs , and went to the All @-@ Star Game that year . After the 1967 season , an article in Ebony said Banks was not thought to have made more than \$ 65 @, @ 000 (equal to \$ 461 @, @ 292 today) in any season . He had received a pay increase from \$ 33 @, @ 000 to \$ 50 @, @ 000 between his MVP seasons in 1958 and 1959 , but Ebony said several MLB players were making \$ 100 @, @ 000 at the time .

= = = Final seasons = = =

Banks won the Lou Gehrig Memorial Award in 1968 , an honor recognizing playing ability and personal character . The 37 @-@ year @-@ old Banks hit 32 home runs , had 83 RBI , and finished that season with a .246 batting average . In 1969 , he came the closest to helping the Cubs win the National League pennant ; the Cubs fell from first place after holding an 8 1 ? 2 game lead in August . Banks made his 11th and final All @-@ Star season appearance as a pinch hitter ; it was his 14th All @-@ Star Game appearance that season . Banks hit his 500th home run on May 12 , 1970 , at Chicago 's Wrigley Field . On December 1 , 1971 , Banks retired as a player but continued to coach for the Cubs until 1973 . He was an instructor in the minor leagues for the next three seasons and also worked in the Cubs ' front office .

Banks finished his career with 512 home runs ; his 277 home runs as a shortstop were a career record at the time of his retirement . (Cal Ripken , Jr now holds the record for most home runs as a shortstop with 345 .) Banks holds Cubs records for games played (2 @,@ 528) , at @-@ bats (9 @,@ 421) , extra @-@ base hits (1 @,@ 009) and total bases (4 @,@ 706) . Banks also excelled as an infielder ; he won a National League Gold Glove Award for shortstop in 1960 . He led the NL in putouts five times and was the NL leader in fielding percentage as shortstop three times , and once as first baseman .

Banks holds the major league record for most games played without a postseason appearance (2 @,@ 528) . In his memoir , citing his fondness for the Cubs and owner Philip K. Wrigley , Banks said he did not regret signing with the Cubs rather than one of the more successful baseball franchises . Banks ' popularity and positive attitude led to the nicknames " Mr. Cub " and " Mr. Sunshine " . Banks was known for his catchphrase , " It 's a beautiful day for a ballgame ... Let 's play two ! " , expressing his wish to play a doubleheader every day out of his love of baseball .

= = Personal life = =

In 1953 , after returning from military service in Germany , Banks married his first wife Mollye Ector . He proposed to her in a letter from Germany . Although he filed for divorce two years later , the couple briefly reconciled in early 1959 . By that summer , they agreed on a divorce settlement that would pay \$ 65 @,@ 000 to Ector in lieu of alimony . Shortly thereafter , Banks eloped with Eloyce Johnson . The couple had twin sons within a year and a daughter four years after that . Ector filed suit against Banks in 1963 for failure to make payments on a life insurance policy agreed upon in their divorce settlement .

Banks was a lifelong Republican ? and he also once stated that " I 'm not goin ' anywhere I 'm not wanted " ? prompting critics to claim that he was " soft " on Jim Crow ; he ran for alderman in Chicago in 1963 . He lost the election and later said , " People knew me only as a baseball player . They didn 't think I qualified as a government official and no matter what I did I couldn 't change my image ... What I learned , was that it was going to be hard for me to disengage myself from my baseball life and I would have to compensate for it after my playing days were over . "

In 1966 , Banks worked for Seaway National Bank in the off @-@ season and enrolled in a banking correspondence course . He bought into several business ventures , including a gas station , during his playing career . Though he had been paid modestly in comparison to other baseball stars , Banks had taken the advice of Wrigley and invested much of his earnings . He later spent time working for an insurance company and for New World Van Lines . Banks began building assets that would be worth an estimated \$ 4 million by the time he was 55 years old .

Banks and Bob Nelson became the first black owners of a U.S. Ford Motor Company dealership in 1967 . Nelson had been the first non @-@ white commissioned officer in the United States Army Air Forces during World War II ; he operated an import car dealership before the venture with Banks . Banks was appointed to the board of directors of the Chicago Transit Authority in 1969 . On a trip to Europe , Banks visited the Pope , who presented him with a medal that became a proud possession .

Banks was divorced from Eloyce in 1981 . She received several valuable items from his playing career as part of their divorce settlement , including his 500th home run ball . She sold the items not long after the divorce . He remarried in 1984 . In 1993 , his third wife Marjorie was part of a group

that met with MLB executives to discuss race relations in baseball after allegations of racial slurs surfaced against Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott . Banks married Liz Ellzey in 1997 and Hank Aaron served as his best man . In late 2008 , Banks and Ellzey adopted an infant daughter .

Banks 's nephew , Bob Johnson , was a major league catcher and first baseman for the Texas Rangers between 1981 and 1983 . His great nephew , Acie Law , is a professional basketball player who attended Texas A & M University before playing in the National Basketball Association (NBA) .

= = Later years = =

Banks was voted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1977 , his first year of eligibility . He received votes on 321 of the 383 ballots . Though several players were selected through the Veterans Committee and the Special Committee on the Negro Leagues that year , Banks was the only player elected by the Baseball Writers ' Association of America . He was inducted on August 8 of that year . During his induction speech , Banks said , " We 've got the setting ? sunshine , fresh air , the team behind us . So let 's play two ! "

The Cubs retired Banks ' uniform number 14 in 1982 . He was the first player to have his number retired by the team . At the time of the ceremony , Banks was employed as the Cubs ' corporate sales representative . The team did not retire any more numbers for another five years , when Billy Williams received the honor . Through the 2014 season , only six former Cubs , along with Brooklyn Dodger Jackie Robinson , have had their numbers retired by the organization .

Banks served as a team ambassador after his retirement , though author Phil Rogers says the team had never placed Banks in a position of authority or significant influence . In 1983 , shortly after Wrigley sold the team to the Tribune Company , Banks and the Cubs briefly severed ties . Rogers wrote that after the sale , Banks was viewed as " something of a crazy uncle who hung around the house for no apparent reason " , and that team officials anonymously told the press that Banks had been fired because he was unreliable . Soon Banks and the Cubs reconciled and he resumed making appearances on behalf of the team .

In 1984 , when the Cubs won the NL East division , the club named Banks an honorary team member . At the 1990 Major League Baseball All @-@ Star Game , the first one held at Wrigley Field since Banks ' playing days , he threw out the ceremonial first pitch to starting catcher Mike Scioscia . Banks was named to the Major League Baseball All @-@ Century Team in 1999 . In the same year , the Society for American Baseball Research listed him 27th on a list of the 100 greatest baseball players .

In June 2006 , Crain 's Chicago Business said Banks was part of a group looking into buying the Chicago Cubs in case the Tribune Company decided to sell the club . Banks established a charity , the Live Above & Beyond Foundation , which assists youth and the elderly with issues including self @-@ esteem and healthcare . In 2008 , Banks released a charity wine called Ernie Banks 512 Chardonnay , the proceeds of which were donated to his foundation .

Banks was an ordained minister ; he presided at the wedding of MLB pitcher Sean Marshall . On March 31 , 2008 , a statue of Banks (" Mr. Cub ") was unveiled in front of Wrigley Field . That year , Eddie Vedder released a song called " All The Way " , which Banks had asked Vedder to write about the Cubs as a birthday gift .

In 2009 , Banks was named a Library of Congress Living Legend , a designation that recognizes those " who have made significant contributions to America 's diverse cultural , scientific and social heritage " . In 2013 , he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom with 15 other people , including Bill Clinton and Oprah Winfrey . During the ceremony , he presented President Obama with a bat that had belonged to Jackie Robinson . Banks remained close to the Cubs team and made frequent appearances at their spring training grounds , HoHoKam Stadium in Arizona . Author Harry Strong wrote in 2013 that " the Chicago Cubs do not have a mascot , but they hardly need one when the face of the franchise is still so visible " .

Ernie Banks was inducted as a Laureate of The Lincoln Academy of Illinois and awarded the Order of Lincoln (the State 's highest honor) by the Governor of Illinois in 1970 in the area of Sports .

== Death ==

Banks died of a heart attack at a Chicago hospital on January 23 , 2015 , eight days before his 84th birthday . Following a public visitation , a memorial service was held at the Fourth Presbyterian Church . Several well @-@ known people spoke at the service , including Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel and baseball personalities Joe Torre and Billy Williams . After the service , a procession moved from Downtown Chicago toward Wrigley Field .

In the weeks after his death , a legal battle arose over Banks ' estate and the disposition of his body . His estranged widow Elizabeth said that he had amended his will in October without her knowledge . The new will left all of Banks ' assets to his longtime caregiver , Regina Rice . Banks had been diagnosed with dementia shortly before the change in his will . A Chicago funeral home sent Elizabeth a bill for \$ 35 @,@ 000 in funeral costs , but the bill went unpaid as Elizabeth challenged the legality of Banks ' new will . In March 2015 , the Chicago Cubs announced that they would pay the funeral home costs .