

= Nig Clarke =

Jay Justin " Nig " Clarke (December 15 , 1882 ? June 15 , 1949) was a Canadian professional baseball player . A catcher , Clarke played in Major League Baseball (MLB) for nine seasons with the Detroit Tigers , Cleveland Naps , St. Louis Browns , Philadelphia Phillies , and Pittsburgh Pirates . In 506 career games , Clarke recorded a batting average of .254 and accumulated 20 triples , six home runs , and 127 runs batted in (RBI) .

Born in Canada and raised in Michigan , Clarke began his baseball career in 1902 , when he reportedly hit eight home runs while playing for the Corsicana Oil Citys of the Texas League . From there , he spent two more seasons in the minor leagues before the Cleveland Naps signed him to a contract . Aside from a loan to the Detroit Tigers , he played for the Naps for six seasons . Clarke was then traded to the St. Louis Browns , where he played for one season . After several years in the minor leagues , Clarke joined the United States Marine Corps . He returned to the major leagues and played there until 1920 , then continued playing for minor league teams until 1927 . Clarke then retired from the game , rejoined the Marines , and moved to River Rouge , Michigan , where he lived until his death in 1949 .

= = Early life = =

Clarke was born in 1882 at Anderdon Township (now Amherstburg , Ontario) , Canada . He moved to Detroit , Michigan as a child in April 1888 . He began playing semi @-@ pro baseball in Adrian , Michigan , while studying at Assumption College in Windsor , Ontario , Canada . Early in his career , he was given the nickname of " Nig " by newspapers due to his dark complexion .

= = Professional baseball = =

= = = Early career = = =

Clarke began his professional career in 1902 with the Corsicana Oil Citys in the Texas League . On July 14 , he hit eight home runs in ten at bats in a 51 ? 3 victory over the Texarkana Casketmakers . Because Corsicana 's blue laws forbade Sunday baseball (or , according to The Sporting News , due to poor attendance in Corsicana) , the game was played in Ennis , Texas , in a facility that has a right field fence estimated to be 210 feet from home plate along the foul line . While some cast doubt on Clarke 's eight home run game , the feat was later attested to by the official scorer (under oath) and by others who observed the game . In a 1940 interview with The Sporting News one of Clarke 's Corsicana teammates claimed : " The right field fence at Ennis wasn 't more than 40 feet back of first base . Nig just pulled eight short flies around and over that wall . I 'm not taking anything away from old Nig 's batting prowess , but that 's the way he hit eight homers that day . Didn 't have to send the ball more than 140 feet at the most . "

In 1903 , Clarke played for the Little Rock Travelers in the Southern Association , and had a batting average of .254 in 41 games . While with Little Rock , he clashed with owner Mike Finn , who refused to trade him throughout the season despite Clarke 's demands and trade offers by other teams . After the 1903 season ended , he was traded to the Atlanta Crackers of the same league . With Atlanta , Clarke started off the first half of the season with a .400 batting average before cooling down in the second half . He finished the season with a .264 average in 135 games .

= = = Cleveland Naps = = =

At the end of the 1904 season , the Cleveland Naps purchased Clarke from Atlanta . The plan was for Clarke to be the third catcher on the roster behind Harry Bemis and Fritz Buelow , and as a result , he only played in a few games during the first half of the season . In August 1905 , Clarke briefly joined the Detroit Tigers after the Cleveland team traveled to Boston without him . He was loaned to

Detroit with the understanding that the Naps could reclaim him on one day 's notice . Clarke appeared in only three games for Detroit , compiling a .429 batting average and a home run before being recalled by the Naps . In 45 games between both teams on the season , he had a .208 batting average .

Clarke began the 1906 season as the third string catcher . A month into the season , Naps manager Nap Lajoie changed the roster around partially due to Clarke 's hitting , which had improved greatly from last season . To end the year , Clarke compiled a career high batting average of .358 , tying him with George Stone for the American League batting championship . However , Stone was recognized as the batting champion because Clarke had only appeared in only 57 games with 195 plate appearances . Clarke began to wear shin guards early in his career , and was one of the first ballplayers to adopt this layer of protection .

After spending the offseason playing winter baseball in Florida with several other major leaguers , Clarke became the everyday catcher for the 1907 season . He started off hitting well , and had a batting average of .381 through the first month of the league , which was second in the American League . He started nearly every game for the Naps until his finger was hit by a foul ball in a game in June , causing him to miss two weeks . By the end of the season , he had stopped playing well , finishing the season with a .269 batting average and six triples in 120 games , as well as a league @-@ leading 25 passed balls . During the offseason , Clarke played winter baseball in Cuba , then returned to Cleveland in March .

Clarke spent the 1908 season splitting time at the catcher position with Bemis , as both struggled in spring practice . In September , Clarke sustained an injury in a game against Detroit when the bone of a finger on his right hand was split and he was unable to grow a nail . On October 2 , he caught a perfect game thrown by Addie Joss , which was only the fourth perfect game in MLB history . He finished the year with a .241 batting average and six triples in 97 games . On Thanksgiving night in 1908 , Clarke was married to Mary A. Smith at the home of the bride 's parents in Sandwich , Ontario , Canada . His wife did not like the " Nig " nickname that sports reporters used , and wanted them to simply call him Jay in newspapers .

The signing of Ted Easterly and Grover Land gave the Naps four catchers entering spring training . Easterly became the starting catcher and Bemis the backup due to Clarke 's " lack of ambition " , which led to speculation that he could be traded during the season . He finished the season with a .274 batting average in 55 games . During the offseason , St. Louis Browns player @-@ manager Jack O 'Connor attempted to trade for Clarke , but a deal never materialized . Clarke saw little playing time in 1910 due to a bout of typhoid fever , which landed him in the hospital for most of the season . He played 21 games that season , batting .155 .

= = = St. Louis Browns and minor leagues = = =

On December 14 , 1910 , Cleveland traded Clarke to the St. Louis Browns in exchange for Art Griggs . Clarke split time with Jim Stephens at catcher for the Browns , and appeared in 82 games for the team in 1911 , compiling a .215 batting average . After the 1911 season , was released on waivers to the Washington Senators . The Senators , however , had no interest in him and tried to undo the acceptance , which was overruled by American League president Ban Johnson . Shortly afterwards , he was sold to the Indianapolis Indians in the American Association , where he played from 1912 to 1913 . In 1912 , he hit .266 in 92 games , and the following year he hit .282 in 28 games .

Partway through the 1913 season , Clarke was sold to the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League , where he played from 1913 to 1915 . With San Francisco , he hit .281 and .222 in 1913 and 1914 , respectively . He also played parts of the 1915 season with the Houston Buffaloes of the Texas League and the Memphis Chickasaws of the Southern Association , playing in 81 total games for the three teams . In 1916 , Clarke was traded by Houston to the Mobile Sea Gulls of the Southern Association for Hub Northen . That season , he batted .149 in 20 games before being released .

= = = Later career = = =

On August 1 , 1917 , Clarke enlisted in the United States Marine Corps . While serving , he attained the rank of corporal and served in Brest , France . In 1918 , while serving in the Marine Corps , Clarke filed a military naturalization petition and became a United States citizen ; a year later he was discharged . While serving in the Marines , Clarke stated that he wished he " joined the marine corps twelve years ago and never played ball . "

In 1919 , he returned mid @-@ season to the major leagues with the Philadelphia Phillies . He appeared in 26 games , compiling a .242 batting average . He led the National League with a 58 @.@ 8 % caught stealing percentage . Prior to 1919 , only three catchers in major league history had ever compiled a higher caught stealing percentage . In November 1919 , Clarke was selected off waivers by the Pittsburgh Pirates from the Phillies . He appeared in three games for the Pirates and had no hits in seven at bats . He appeared in his final major league game on April 24 , 1920 .

After his brief stay in Pittsburgh , the Pirates sent Clarke to Greenville in 1920 . He played next for Toledo and Winston @-@ Salem , and then for the Reading Aces in the International League during the 1922 and 1923 seasons . In 1924 , he played for both Reading and Harrisburg . In 1925 , he played for the Salisbury Indians in the Eastern Shore League . In the spring of 1925 , The Sporting News wrote : " Nig Clarke not only led the league with the bat and the mitt and the arm , he was the very picture of a baseball player . I rather suspect that Nig put away as much corn juice as the next man . In the days of his greatness he was wont to take a couple of snifters every morning before breakfast . Never seemed to hurt Nig any . " At the end of the season , he was given most valuable player honors for his performance with Salisbury . Clarke concluded his professional baseball career in 1927 with Tulsa .

= = Later life = =

At the time of the 1920 U.S. Census , Clarke and his wife were living in Detroit . In June 1929 , Clarke rejoined the Marine Corps , serving until August 1932 . At the time of the 1930 U.S. Census , Clarke was stationed at the Quantico Marine Barracks in Prince William County , Virginia . After being discharged from the Marine Corps , Clarke built a house in River Rouge , a suburb of Detroit , where he lived with his mother . In June 1949 , Clarke was found dead at his home in River Rouge .