

= Jeff Heath =

John Geoffrey " Jeff " Heath ( 1 April 1915 ? 9 December 1975 ) was a Canadian @-@ born American left fielder in Major League Baseball ( MLB ) who played most of his career for the Cleveland Indians .

He was one of the American League 's most promising power hitters of the late 1930s and early 1940s , twice led the AL in triples , and batted at least .340 with over 100 runs batted in ( RBIs ) each time . In 1941 he was selected to his first All @-@ Star Game and that same season became the first player from the American League to become a member of the 20 ? 20 ? 20 club when he hit 20 each of doubles , triples and home runs in the same season . His other All @-@ Star Game selections were in 1943 and 1945 .

Heath played for the Washington Senators and St. Louis Browns during the 1946 season and the National League 's ( NL ) Boston Braves beginning in 1948 . He incurred a compound fracture to his ankle in September 1948 and subsequently the Braves were without their starting left fielder for the 1948 World Series . In 1949 , Heath 's last season in the majors , sportswriter Franklin Lewis wrote , " There was the inimitable Heath who ... should have been one of the greatest players in history . But there were no valves on his temper . He grinned in the manner of a schoolboy or he snarled with the viciousness of a tiger . "

= = Early life = =

Heath was born 1 April 1915 , in Fort William , Ontario . His family moved to Victoria , British Columbia before settling in Seattle , Washington . He attended Garfield High School in Seattle where he played baseball and football . As a freshman he made the varsity baseball squad . Heath was a multi @-@ sport athlete and was offered scholarships from various schools to play American football . University of Washington head coach Jimmy Phelan said Heath was the best fullback in the country . Heath chose a future in baseball , however , and in 1935 , he signed with the Yakima Bears of the semipro Northwest League , where he hit .390 . He was selected as an All @-@ American amateur team member , managed by Les Mann and played games in Japan . For the tour his batting average was .483 . Heath faced difficulties being allowed re @-@ entry upon the team 's arrival to the U.S. and became a naturalized U.S. citizen .

Cleveland Indians scout Willie Kamm helped sign Heath to a contract with the organization in 1936 . Kamm said , " If this kid isn 't a big leaguer I 've wasted a lot of time learning baseball . " He reported to spring training with the New Orleans Pelicans of the Southern Association . One of his hands became infected and the Indians moved him to their Class C Mid @-@ Atlantic team , the Zanesville Greys . With the Greys , he hit league @-@ bests with 187 RBIs and a .383 average , while his 28 home runs were second @-@ most . He was called up to join the Indians before the 1936 season ended .

= = Cleveland Indians = =

Heath , who batted left @-@ handed and threw right @-@ handed and broke in with the Indians in 1936 at the age of 21 , appeared in 12 games with the club and recorded a .341 batting average and seven extra @-@ base hits . During spring training leading up to the 1937 season , Heath was describing as getting " as much attention as the backline of a Broadway chorus . " He appeared in 20 games and hit .230 for the season . During spring training before the 1938 season , Indians manager Oscar Vitt said Heath was " the best natural hitter I 've seen since Joe Jackson . " One columnist described Vitt 's decision to employ Heath :

" Vitt finally decided to use Jeff Heath , the chap with the bulging muscles , in his left pasture . There are few better hitters in the American league than the husky from Washington . Jeff is not the most graceful ballhawk in captivity and he may toss to the wrong base , but put a bat in his hands and the opposition 's pitcher will tremble . "

In his first full season in 1938 , he batted .343 ? behind only batting champion Jimmie Foxx 's .349

? while leading the league with 18 triples . Upon the conclusion of the season , Heath joined fellow American League ( AL ) players , and Indians teammate Bob Feller , in exhibition games played around the country ( also known as barnstorming ) , mostly in cities which did not have a major league team . He had 21 home runs and 112 RBIs , collected 58 hits in August alone , and was among the league leaders in slugging average and total bases for the 1938 season . In January 1939 , he married Theabelle Callard . He finished with a .292 batting average in 1939 . The season also included a late @-@ season punch to a fan from Heath during a home game in Cleveland . " It was just another blunder in a bad season that has been full of mistakes " , Heath said of the incident . Before the 1940 season , Heath said , " I 'm going to show ' em I 'm no flash in the pan . Last year I was overswinging and taking my eye of the ball . I 'm not going to do that this season . " During the season , Heath was one of 12 reported players who presented a list of grievances against Vitt to Indians President Alva Bradley . Bradley called a meeting with the players and by the end of it , a statement of support from the players for Vitt was released . Twenty @-@ one Indians signed the document , while Heath was one of four who did not , as he was one of two in the hospital at the time of the meeting . Instances between Vitt and his players , including Heath , continued past June , however . Heath was suspended by Vitt after a game in August after the two exchanged words following a strikeout by Heath , who was put in the game as a pinch @-@ hitter . Indians Vice President C.C. Slapnicka withdrew the suspension . The Indians finished the regular season with an 89 ? 65 record in Vitt 's last season as manager and Heath a career @-@ low .219 average . The Indians lost the AL pennant by one game to the Detroit Tigers and Heath received much of the blame , although Vitt was released as the team 's manager and replaced by Roger Peckinpaugh .

Peckinpaugh announced in December 1940 Heath would remain a starting outfielder with the club . Heath came back in 1941 with a season campaign in which he again led the AL with 20 triples , batted .340 ( fourth in the league ) , and was third in slugging behind Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio . He also finished second in total bases and RBIs ( behind DiMaggio ) as well as second in hits , made his first All @-@ Star team , and finished eighth in the Most Valuable Player award voting . He became the first AL player to make the 20 @-@ 20 @-@ 20 club , having recorded 20 doubles , triples and home runs in one season .

Heath worked as a draftsman for Seattle @-@ Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation during the off @-@ season leading up to 1943 . In years previous , Heath had been described as " lazy " and " lacking aggressiveness " but the 1943 season appeared to be different , including investing extra time in batting practice . He was selected for the All @-@ Star Game and finished fourth in the AL in home runs with 18 . Heath was rejected in 1944 for military duty due to knee problems . During the 1944 season Heath was mainly used as a pinch @-@ hitter . In the off @-@ season he underwent knee surgery and entered a contract dispute with the Indians . He did not join the team until June of the 1945 season after a two @-@ month holdout . Despite missing the beginning part of the season , he was still named an All @-@ Star although the game was not played due to travel restrictions during World War II . He finished the season with a batting average of .305 and his 15 home runs were fifth in the AL . In 1943 he became the second player born outside the U.S. to hit 100 home runs , and he surpassed George Selkirk with his 109th home run in 1945 .

Heath , who had acquired the nickname " Lord Jeff " , was called a " problem child " by Indian player @-@ manager Lou Boudreau . Peckinpaugh once said that Heath " could have been one of the greatest players . He had the ability to do about anything . He could run , he could throw , and he could hit . But he just had no hustle , no nothing . If a ball went by him , he just might walk after it . " In December 1945 the Indians traded Heath to the Washington Senators where he started in right field .

= = Washington Senators and St. Louis Browns = =

In 1946 , Senators ' President Clark Griffith agreed to send outfielder George Case to Cleveland in exchange for Heath . Of the trade , Griffith said , " We 've sacrificed plenty of speed for a man of tremendous hitting power . " During spring training , the addition of Heath led to the Senators being described as a " dark horse . " The Associated Press continued :

" Heath 's performance may be the key to the Senators ' fate . The husky Canadian is the kind of slugger Washington was crying for last fall . He can break up a ball game with one mighty swish of his bat but , to put it mildly , there always has been an uncertain quality about him . Big Jeff was dissatisfied in Cleveland , didn 't like the ballpark , didn 't like the management , didn 't like anything . Still , he has been a most valuable hitter , perhaps one of the best in the game when he is settled down to business . "

But Heath would appear in just 48 games with the Senators . He finished with the team hitting .283 with four home runs and 27 RBIs , his last game on 15 June before he was traded to the St. Louis Browns in mid @-@ June for Al LaMacchia and Joe Grace . In his first game with the Browns on 17 June he went 1 @-@ for @-@ 3 with one RBI . The Browns , who were 23 ? 32 at the time Heath joined the club , finished the 1946 season 66 ? 88 . Heath finished with 12 home runs and 57 RBIs in 86 games with the Browns .

Again , the Heath tendency for resentment and trouble led to the Browns trade . Washington had a utility infielder , Sherry Robertson , who was the nephew of owner Clark Griffith . During games , Heath would ride Robertson on the bench , calling him " owner 's pet " , in reference to the possibility that Robertson was only on the team due to that relationship , and the possibility that Robertson was better paid than Heath . This was the subject of a column in the Washington Post after Heath was gone by longtime sports writer Shirley Povich , who hated to see the Heath bat leave Washington .

The Browns were the second team in the AL to add black players to their roster after the Indians signed Larry Doby in July 1947 . Willard Brown and Hank Thompson were teammates of Heath 's during the 1947 season , but Heath was described as committing a " petulant display of prejudice " towards Brown after Brown hit a home run with one of Heath 's old bats . Brown preferred to use a heavy bat and did not bring his own after being told by the Browns the team would supply him with bats . Brown found one of Heath 's damaged bats and applied tape to the affix the knob to the end of the bat . When he tried to use the bat during a game , the umpire told him he could not use the bat with tape applied , so Brown discarded the loose fragments of the bat and proceeded to hit a home run during the at @-@ bat . When he returned to the dugout , however , Heath destroyed the bat when he hit it against the dugout wall .

Heath had a career @-@ high 27 home runs during the 1947 season , but the Browns finished in eighth and last place in the AL . In the Browns ' final game , Heath was already in the clubhouse showers when it was his turn to bat in the ninth inning . Upon the conclusion of the season , Browns management was looking to overhaul the team roster . Browns General Manager Bill DeWitt tried to shop Heath to a National League team rather than leave him in the AL . On 4 December it was announced the Boston Braves of the National League had acquired Heath .

= = Boston Braves = =

Unlike the Browns , the Braves were contenders all the way to the end of the 1948 season . In a game against the Philadelphia Phillies on 3 September , and with the Braves tied for the NL lead , Heath hit a two @-@ run home run and the Braves went on to win the game , 3 ? 1 , and stayed in first place for the remainder of the regular season . With the Braves up five games in the NL standings and four games remaining on their regular season schedule , the Braves had a match @-@ up with the Brooklyn Dodgers on 29 September but according to teammate Clint Conatser , Heath asked Braves manager Billy Southworth for the night off but his request was denied . During the game , Heath attempted to score from second base and slid towards home plate to try and beat the tag by Dodgers catcher Roy Campanella . As he slid , his foot got caught in the dirt which caused his ankle to twist . " I began to slide about five feet from the plate . Funny thing , I generally get my spikes up off the ground , but this time I didn 't . I looked at my foot , which was twisted all the way around , and honestly I thought it would come right off " , Heath said the next day from a local hospital . After playing in the majors for parts of 12 years , he would be forced to miss the World Series as it was later diagnosed he fractured his ankle . He called the broken ankle " the biggest disappointment of my life . " A widely published newspaper photograph of the play showed

Heath sliding toward the plate , mouth open in shock , with his leg bent mid @-@ ankle with the lower ankle rotated ninety degrees to the upper ankle . He was quoted asking himself " Why did I slide ? " when he was carried off the field on a stretcher and later put in an ambulance . In 1964 , Heath said :

" I guess I didn 't tuck my leg while sliding . Carl Furillo ( Dodger rightfielder ) made the throw . He had a great arm and I was out a mile . They ( sportswriters ) said it was an unnecessary slide in a game that didn 't mean anything . The hell it was , you always slide . Besides Johnny Sain ( Braves pitcher ) was after his 23rd win and we wanted to shove Brooklyn into third place . "

Heath 's regular season came to an end , as he batted .319 with 20 home runs on the season . The Braves ' season came to an end after six games in the World Series as they lost to the Indians , four games to two .

Heath played in the minors the following season before eventually rejoining the Braves during the 1949 season . In a game on 28 August , Heath helped tie the Cincinnati Reds with a home run in the ninth inning and helped win the game for the Braves with another in the 10th inning . He ended his final major league season after 36 games into the 1949 season . He batted .306 with nine homers and 23 RBIs . In October 1949 , the Braves placed Heath on waivers and general manager John Quinn offered him a managing position with a team in the Braves farm system , but he never accepted Quinn 's offer to manage . Baseball historian Bill James when summarizing the 1940s listed Heath as the recipient for his designation of " A Better Ballplayer Than a Human Being . " Southworth said , " They told me when I got him from the American League that Heath was a troublemaker . If he is , I 'd sure like to have eight other troublemakers like him . "

= = Retirement = =

Before he retired from professional baseball , Heath appeared in 57 games for the Seattle Rainiers of the Pacific Coast League . He was later fired from the team . In 1951 , he was given a trial basis with the Rainiers but was never signed .

Sportswriter Franklin Lewis interviewed Heath and asked if he would do anything differently in his career if he was given the chance . Heath responded , " I wouldn 't gag around as much . I shouldn 't have popped off . It 's all right for little guys to talk loud , but not a big ox like me . "

In his 14 @-@ season major league career , Heath posted a .293 batting average and a .509 slugging average , with 194 home runs , 1 @,@ 447 hits , 887 RBIs , 777 runs , 279 doubles , 102 triples and 56 stolen bases in 1 @,@ 383 games played . Bobby Thomson surpassed him in 1955 to become the major leagues ' home run leader among foreign @-@ born players . Heath was the first player to hit a home run in all AL and NL ballparks . He was named as one of the " Top 100 Greatest Indians . " In 1988 he was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame .

He worked briefly as a scout for the Cleveland Indians . He later worked as a color commentator with the Rainiers and did advertising work in the Seattle area . During one game while Heath provided commentary , he cursed into the microphone on @-@ air and later apologized . A station manager later approached him regarding the incident and Heath responded by throwing the manager down a flight of stairs .

Heath died of a heart attack in Seattle at age 60 . He had suffered a heart attack in 1957 at the age of 43 . He was survived by two daughters and one son .