

= Vern Bickford =

Vernon Edgell Bickford (August 17 , 1920 ? May 6 , 1960) was an American professional baseball player . A right @-@ handed starting pitcher , he played six seasons in Major League Baseball (MLB) for the Boston / Milwaukee Braves from 1948 to 1953 in the National League , and one game for the Baltimore Orioles of the American League in 1954 .

Bickford was born in Kentucky but raised in West Virginia . He began his professional career in 1939 and , after serving in World War II , made the majors in 1949 . Acquired by the Braves organization due to a flip of a coin , Bickford became one of the most promising National League pitchers during his playing career , earning All @-@ Star honors in 1949 and leading the National League in complete games in 1950 . However his career was soon shorted by multiple arm injuries , and he was out of baseball by 1955 . After working an assortment of jobs , he was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 1960 and died after a three @-@ month illness .

He is best known for throwing a no @-@ hitter against the Brooklyn Dodgers on August 11 , 1950 .

= = Early life = =

Bickford was born in Hellier , Kentucky and raised in Berwind , West Virginia . He began playing semi @-@ professional baseball in 1939 for a local West Virginian team , before signing with the Welch Minors of the Class @-@ D Mountain State League the same year . He served three years in the armed forces during World War II where he later claimed " helped " improve his career , as he got pitching tips from several professional Major League ballplayers .

= = Minor league career = =

Bickford was groomed to be a relief pitcher in minor league baseball and played four seasons with the Welch Minors before going off to fight in World War II . He came back to the Braves system in 1946 where he played for the Jackson Senators of the Southeastern League , where he had a 10 ? 12 win @-@ loss record with a 3 @.@ 33 earned run average (ERA) , and one game with the Hartford Chiefs of the Eastern League .

He was promoted to the Indianapolis Indians of the American Association for the 1947 campaign when Indianapolis owner Frank McKinney bought controlling interest in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization . Allegedly , Bickford stayed as part of the Braves organization due to a flip of a coin at a local bar . An argument endured between McKinney , Braves president Lou Perini and Braves general manager John Quinn during spring training over the fate of the players in the organization , with McKinney wanting to move Indianapolis and all its players to the Pirates organization . Via a gentleman 's agreement , they decided to split the players with a flip of a coin . They flipped a coin for the first selection , similar to a sports draft . If the coin landed heads , the player was headed to the Pirates organization and if it landed tails they stayed in Braves organization . The coin landed on tails , and the Braves picked Bickford and took over his contract . Perini later recalled on why he selected Bickford . Brooklyn 's general manager Branch Rickey had interest in the young right @-@ hander , and Perini thought that " if Bickford was good enough for Rickey , he was good enough for the Braves " . Bickford played for the Milwaukee Brewers in 1947 , where he had a 9 ? 5 win @-@ loss record with a 3 @.@ 78 earned run average in 29 games , 14 of which were starts .

= = Major League career = =

Bickford was expected to start the 1948 season in the minor leagues due to lack of control . However , a friend of Boston Braves manager Billy Southworth stated that Bickford was likely better as a starting pitcher and reached the major league roster . His Major League debut was on April 24 , 1948 in a 16 ? 9 loss against the New York Giants . He entered in relief at the top of the fourth inning , after Al Lyons gave up three earned runs to start the inning . He got Sid Gordon to hit to a double play and after giving up a single to Johnny Mize , he retired Willard Marshall on a grounder to

end the inning . He made his first career start against the Pirates , a 4 ? 1 victory on May 19 in which he only gave up five hits . On June 7 , he pitched a four @-@ hitter in an 11 ? 1 victory over the Chicago Cubs , throwing five perfect innings before giving up a hit to Dick Cullen to start the sixth inning . He finished with an 11 ? 5 mark and a 3 @.@ 27 earned run average as the Braves won the National League pennant and advanced to the 1948 World Series against the Cleveland Indians . In his only World Series appearance , he started Game 3 , where he gave up one run on four hits in 3 @.@ 1 innings pitched and was charged with the loss .

= = = 1949 ? 50 = = =

In 1949 , Bickford went 16 ? 11 with a 4 @.@ 25 earned run average and made the National League All @-@ Star team . He finished seventh in the league in complete games (15) and third in games started (36) behind teammate Warren Spahn and Ken Raffensberger of the Cincinnati Reds . He lost a no @-@ hitter in the ninth inning in one of those games . At season 's end Bickford , alongside Spahn and teammate Johnny Sain created one of the most formidable pitching trios in the league for the next several years .

His best season statistical @-@ wise came in 1950 , when he went 19 ? 14 with a 3 @.@ 47 earned run average and led the National League in games started (39) , complete games (27) , innings pitched (311 @.@ 2) and batters faced (1 @,@ 325) . He also finished eighth in the league with 126 strikeouts . The high point of his career was his 7 ? 0 no @-@ hitter against the Brooklyn Dodgers on August 11 , the first no @-@ hitter in the Major Leagues since Rex Barney threw one for Brooklyn in 1948 , and the first one for the Braves since Jim Tobin in 1944 . He retired the first 10 batters before walking Gene Hermanski in the fourth inning . Overall he walked four batters , and Duke Snider hit into a double play to end the game . Afterwards , Bickford stated that " all he wanted was the game " . His no @-@ hitter helped stay the Braves in the pennant race , falling five games behind the Philadelphia Phillies . However the Braves faltered and finished fourth with an 83 ? 79 record , eight games behind the Phillies in the standings . Bickford struggled near the end of the year , falling short in his six games in an attempt to record a 20 win season .

= = = Later career = = =

In 1951 , he had an 11 ? 9 win @-@ loss record with a career low 3 @.@ 12 earned run average in 25 games . His 3 @.@ 12 earned run average was good for eighth in the league . However , Bickford broke a finger in 1951 after being hit by a line drive , missed most of the final three months of the season and never regained his prior form . In 1952 , he was 7 ? 12 with a 3 @.@ 74 earned run average in 26 games , 22 of them starts . He played for the Braves when the team moved to Milwaukee before the 1953 season ; however , he suffered from bone spurs in his pitching arm . During the 1953 season , Bickford had a 2 ? 5 win @-@ loss record with a 5 @.@ 28 earned run average .

In 1954 , Bickford was sold to the Baltimore Orioles for an undisclosed amount of cash and catcher Charlie White . The New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox were both interested in Bickford 's services , but general manager John Quinn decided to go with Baltimore 's offer . He only played one game , a start against the Chicago White Sox on April 24 . He gave up five runs , four of them earned , in four innings before being credited with the 14 ? 4 loss . A pinched nerve in his throwing arm and eventual elbow surgery shortened his career . In 1955 , he unsuccessfully tried a brief comeback with the Triple @-@ A Richmond Virginians in the International League . He pitched in nine games before retiring due to complications of his arm injuries .

= = Personal life and death = =

Following his playing career , Bickford worked an assortment of jobs , as an automobile dealer , a traveling salesman and a carpenter . He spent the last few months of his life hospitalized from cancer , dropping 65 pounds , and telling the media a few days before his death about beating the

cancer in order to coach professional baseball . He died of cancer in Maguire Veterans Hospital in Richmond , Virginia , at age of 39 . He left behind a wife and three sons at the time of his death . He is buried at Mount Zion Baptist Church Cemetery in New Canton , Virginia .