

= Russ Christopher =

Russell Ormand Christopher ( September 12 , 1917 ? December 5 , 1954 ) was an American right @-@ handed pitcher in Major League Baseball who played for seven seasons in the American League with the Philadelphia Athletics and Cleveland Indians . In 241 career games , Christopher pitched 999 ? innings and posted a win @-@ loss record of 54 ? 64 , with 46 complete games , three shutouts , and a 3 @.@ 37 earned run average ( ERA ) .

A 6 ' 3 , 180 lb. player from Richmond , California , he played minor league baseball in the New York Yankees organization before being acquired by the Athletics in the rule 5 draft . Christopher joined the Athletics ' major league roster in 1942 and played six seasons for them , and made his only All @-@ Star appearance in 1945 . He was traded to the Indians before the 1948 season , and played one year of baseball with them . After the season ended , he retired due to health concerns and worked at an aircraft plant until his death in 1954 .

= = Early life and minor leagues = =

Christopher was born in Richmond , California . His brother , Loyd Christopher , went on to become a major league outfielder . Loyd was the one first interested in becoming a professional baseball player , but would not sign a contract unless Russ signed one as well . As a child , Christopher had a case of rheumatic fever , which damaged his heart .

He had his first taste of professional baseball in 1938 , when he signed with the Clovis Pioneers of the West Texas ? New Mexico League . He pitched in 13 games for the pioneers , posting a 7 ? 5 record , 106 innings pitched and a 4 @.@ 50 ERA . The following year , Christopher joined the El Paso Texans , the rookie @-@ level minor league team of the New York Yankees farm system . In 32 games with the Texans , he posted an 18 ? 7 record , pitched 225 innings and had an ERA of 3 @.@ 68 . He was promoted in 1940 to the Wenatchee Chiefs of the Western International League , where he finished the year with an 8 ? 8 record and a 4 @.@ 72 ERA in 20 games . At the end of the season , he was promoted to the Newark Bears of the International League along with seven other minor league players .

In his lone season with the Bears , Christopher pitched in 31 games . Among those games was a four @-@ hit shutout against the Rochester Red Wings in the International League playoffs to put the Bears up two games to none . In the championship series against the Montreal Royals , Christopher pitched seven solid innings in a victory for the Bears , but injured his back and did not play another game that season . He finished the season with a 16 ? 7 record , a 2 @.@ 82 ERA and 12 complete games . At the conclusion of the season , Christopher was considered the top prospect in the rule 5 draft , and the Philadelphia Athletics selected him with the first pick of the draft .

= = Philadelphia Athletics = =

After pitching with the Athletics in spring training , manager Connie Mack placed Christopher on the major league roster , and he made his debut on April 14 , 1942 . On May 5 , Christopher made his first appearance as a starting pitcher against the Detroit Tigers . The Athletics won the game , 2 ? 1 , and he got his first major league win . After another win five days later , he began a long losing streak . Many of the games he did pitch were in relief , including a game in June against the Cleveland Indians where he only allowed one hit in three innings . He got his third win of the season three months after his second on August 20 in a 2 ? 1 victory over the Washington Nationals . He finished the season with a 4 ? 13 record , a 3 @.@ 82 ERA , 30 total games , 58 strikeouts and 99 walks . The following season , Christopher re @-@ signed with the Athletics , and was one of the few remaining pitchers from the previous year on the team , the rest having been called to serve in World War II . He began the season in the starting rotation , winning his first start of the season against the Boston Red Sox in a 5 ? 0 shutout . Over the course of the season , he converted to a sidearm pitching delivery , which led to three victories in a row for him . After a July 9 loss to the Tigers brought his record to 4 ? 6 , Christopher did not pitch again until August 24 , and spent the

rest of the season pitching in relief . He finished the season with a 5 ? 8 record and a 3 @.@ 45 ERA .

Christopher began the 1944 Philadelphia Athletics season as a member of the starting rotation along with Don Black , Lum Harris and Bobo Newsom . However , he did split time in the first half of the year between the starting rotation and the bullpen . Among those appearances was a 16 @-@ inning match against the Chicago White Sox ; Christopher pitched the final four innings , losing 4 ? 2 after Hal Trosky stole home plate . On July 14 , he pitched a 4 ? 3 victory against the Senators , helping his team defeat Hall of Fame pitcher Early Wynn for the first time in three years . After starting the season with a 4 ? 10 record , on July 22 Christopher went on a seven @-@ game winning streak that culminated with a 5 ? 1 complete game victory over the White Sox . He finished the season with a 14 ? 14 record , 84 strikeouts and an ERA of 2 @.@ 97 . After the season ended , Christopher and others went on a barnstorming tour throughout the United States , ending in Wenatchee , Washington .

The following season , Christopher was part of an optimistic 1945 Athletics team , so much so that coach Earle Mack felt that Christopher , Black , Newsom and Jesse Flores were the best quartet of starting pitchers in the league . He spent most of spring training holding out for a new contract , which was eventually agreed on in the middle of March . He missed the first couple weeks of the season due to injury , and won his season debut on April 18 , a 12 @-@ inning shutout against the Senators . He followed that up with a victory over the Boston Red Sox , allowing only one earned run in his first 21 innings of the season . In mid @-@ June , Christopher had won ten games , which not only led the league , but was more than the seven the rest of the Athletics pitching staff had combined . On July 21 , Christopher was part of a 24 @-@ inning game against the Tigers that ended in a 1 ? 1 tie ; he went 13 innings in the game while Joe Berry pitched the other 11 . Although Christopher had a strong start to the season , he struggled during the second half . He lost seven straight games over a two @-@ month period before winning another on August 19 against the Tigers . He finished the year with a 13 ? 13 record and a 3 @.@ 17 ERA . He was selected to the American League All @-@ Star team , however the game was canceled as a result of World War II .

The 1946 Philadelphia Athletics season began with Christopher the subject of a possible trade . The Athletics tried to obtain Johnny Lindell from the Yankees , but they wanted Christopher in return . Mack refused to give him up , and as a result the trade never materialized . He began the season in the starting rotation , and was the opening day starting pitcher in a 5 ? 0 loss against the Yankees . Over the first part of the season , Christopher again split time between the rotation and the bullpen . In a 7 ? 3 loss to the Indians on July 18 , Christopher could not get out of the second inning , allowing five earned runs . After this , he did not pitch for a month , and spent the rest of the season as an occasional reliever . He finished the season with five wins , seven losses and a 4 @.@ 30 ERA . After the season ended , Christopher began contemplating retirement from baseball . He had lost 10 pounds in the final months of the season and was light to begin with , and decided that he would retire if he could not gain the weight back over the winter .

Christopher gained the weight back and rejoined the Athletics for the 1947 season . While there was talk of keeping him in the rotation , he ended up becoming a full @-@ time reliever for the team . Despite this , Christopher was still able to contribute with his bat ; he drove in the winning run in a May 29 game against the Red Sox . Over the course of the season , Christopher evolved into the Athletics ' closer , finishing the games when the team 's pitchers could not go the distance . He finished the season having played 44 games , finishing 38 of them and getting 12 saves in the process . He also had 10 wins , seven losses , and a 2 @.@ 90 ERA . At the end of the season , Christopher was holding out on his contract , wanting either a starting role in the rotation or more money to remain a reliever . The two sides agreed to a deal at the end of February , and he looked to be a starting pitcher during the 1948 season .

= = Cleveland Indians = =

While Christopher was holding out for a new deal from the Athletics , he was also trying to gain

weight . He went to around 40 banquets on behalf of Connie Mack during the offseason , and despite his eating habits , he remained at 170 pounds , not gaining an ounce . After apparently reaching an agreement with the Athletics , Christopher was purchased by the Cleveland Indians on April 3 , 1948 . While the deal was made between Mack and Indians owner Bill Veeck , Mack said he would not have made it unless Christopher consented to it , which he did not expect to happen . Indians manager Lou Boudreau reacted positively to the trade and felt that he was the missing piece for a pennant run . He said of the trade , " With Christopher on out staff , we 're definitely contenders . "

While Christopher was hoping to start , the Indians felt , like the Athletics , that he would be better as a relief pitcher for them . Early in the season , Christopher told Veeck that 1948 would be his final year , as his wife joined the doctors ' side , wanting him to retire and noting that he was playing on " borrowed time " already . He spent the season as the Indians ' chief relief pitcher alongside Ed Klieman , both of whom were considered two of the best relievers in the league that season . Christopher finished the season with 45 games played , a 3 ? 2 record , a 2 @. @ 90 ERA , and 17 saves , which led the league . In the 1948 World Series , he pitched in game five , facing Mike McCormick and Eddie Stanky . He allowed singles to both hitters and allowed two runs to score , and was relieved by Satchel Paige , ending his only playoff appearance .

After the World Series ended , Christopher mulled over retirement , and in January 1949 , he made it official . However , at the start of February , he reconsidered and signed a contract with the Indians , deciding to play for one more year . A month later , as spring training began , he decided to retire for good , ending his career in baseball .

= = Later life = =

After retiring , Christopher moved to San Diego , where he lived with his wife and three children . In December 1950 , Christopher underwent heart surgery , and afterward felt optimistic about the possibility of pitching again . After a tryout with the Indians in 1951 , he joined the San Diego Padres for a salary of \$ 1 a year . He spent several weeks training with the team , but was eventually released at the end of April , ending his comeback attempt .

When his final attempt at a comeback failed , Christopher went on to work in an aircraft plant in San Diego . He died in his hometown of Richmond , California , at the age of 37 on December 5 , 1954 and is interred at Chapel of the Chimes in Oakland , California .

Russ ' youngest daughter , Lynn Mary Christopher , born August 10 , 1950 , lives 6 months in San Diego County , and 6 months in Prescott , Arizona .