

Billy Joe Davidson, "Tar Heel Bonus Baby"

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First spotted by a Cleveland Indians scout while pitching for a Marion, North Carolina, American Legion team at the age of 13, Billy Joe Davidson signs with the American League team four years later on May 28, 1951, at the Robert E. Lee Hotel in Winston-Salem.

It's reported that Davidson signs for "\$150,000, eclipsing the \$100,000 the Pittsburgh Pirates paid to Paul Pettit two years earlier as the highest total to date paid to a "Bonus Baby".

"It's the Bob Feller story all over again," said Cleveland general manager Hank Greenberg. "This kid was taught by his father to pitch. He started out teaching him to throw in the living room of his home in Marion, N.C.

Then when he got big enough, he trained him out in the backyard."

The 6-3, 215-pound Davidson later reveals that the deal was for \$75,000 and that it was a package deal, with the pitcher getting \$37,500 and his father, Troy, getting the same amount to act as a Cleveland scout.

After going 19-1 in two years (1949 & 1950) at Oak Ridge Military Academy in Greensboro, Cleveland reaches an agreement with the 17-year-old phenom to sign a contract in 1950 with the San Diego Padres of the Pacific Coast League, who have a working agreement with the Indians ... unfortunately for Davidson, the working agreement ends before he can pitch an inning in the PCL.

Having completed his two years of athletic eligibility at Oak Ridge, Davidson is not eligible for conference competition in 1951 ... in addition to his school boy accomplishments, he pitches 11 no-hitters in American Legion and semipro competition.

Hailed as "the new Bob Feller" by Cleveland general manager Hank Greenberg, an 18-year-old Davidson makes his professional baseball debut with the last-place Cedar Rapids Indians on June 14, 1951, allowing three runs on four walks and a single in a one inning relief stint in a 7-2 loss ... afterwards he says, "I was scared, I guess."

Davidson compiles a 51-39 career mark with a 3.85 ERA in six minor league seasons with the Cedar Rapids Indians (1951), the Fort Smith Indians (1951), the Spartanburg Peaches (1952), the Reading Indians (1953); the Indianapolis Indians (1954-55); the San Diego Padres (1955) and the Mobile Bears (1956) ... his best season comes in 1952 when he is 16-8 with a 3.91 ERA for the Spartanburg Peaches of the Tri-State (B) League.

Billy Joe Davidson Year by Year:

Year	Team	League	Level	W-L	INN	H	BB	SO	ERA		
1951	2 Teams	Two Leagues	B-C	4-8	109.0	87	103	-	5.61		
	Cedar Rapids Indians	3-I League	B	1-4	54.0	51	58	26	7.00		
	Fort Smith Indians	Western Assoc.	C	3-4	55.0	36	45	-	4.25		
1952	Spartanburg Peaches	Tri-State	B	16-8	212.0	195	104	146	3.91		
1953	Reading Indians	Eastern	A	11-18	218.0	207	72	-	2.89		
1954	Indianapolis Indians	American Assoc.	AAA	11-7	138.0	138	51	72	3.59		
1955	2 Teams	Two Leagues	Op-AAA	6-4	106.2	103	58	65	5.61		
	San Diego Padres	Pacific Coast	Opn	0-0	1.2	3	3	0	21.60		
	Indianapolis Indians	American Assoc.	AAA	6-4	105.0	100	55	65	5.32		
1956	Mobile Bears	Southern Assoc.	AA	6-8	131.0	126	50	-	3.85		
Minor League Totals				6 Seasons	-	54-53	914.2	856	438	-	3.98

Cleveland Plunks Down Hatfull For Young Billy Joe



BIG CONTRACT—Billy Joe Davidson (seated), 17-year-old Oak Ridge Military Institute baseball pitcher, is shown with Hank Greenberg, general manager of the Cleveland Indians, as he signed a contract with them yesterday. The price paid for Davidson was reported to be the biggest ever offered a player.

"I honestly thought I'd be pitching in the big leagues within three years," said Davidson.

On May 29, 1953, pitching for the Reading Indians of the Eastern (A) League, Davidson pitches his only professional baseball no-hitter in a 3-0

Billy Joe Davidson [2 of 3]:

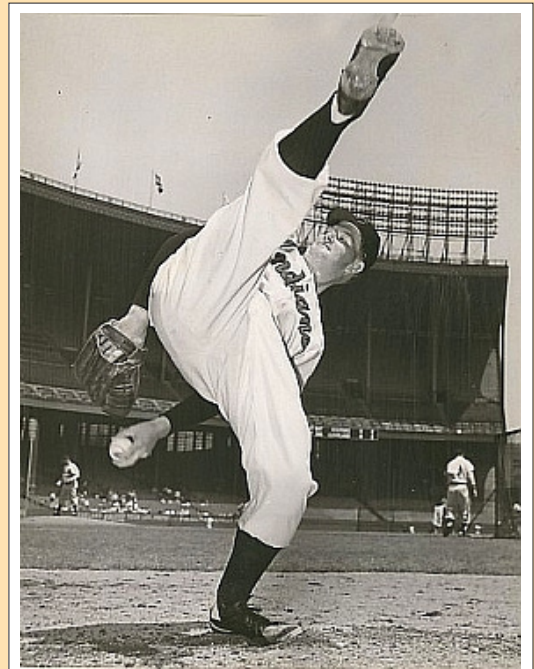
victory over visiting Williamsport ... he walks five and strikes out 10 in picking up his first win of the season.

With the Indianapolis Indians in 1954 and 1955, Davidson is converted to a reliever with 86 relief appearances over two seasons.

In 1956, his final season of organized baseball, the 23-year-old Davidson is 6-8 with a 3.85 ERA for the Mobile Bears (AA Southern Association).

On June 25, 1957, Davidson announces his retirement from professional baseball.

Following his retirement, Davidson is employed by Burlington Industries in Greensboro ... Davidson is later involved in the ownership of an international textile business.



**Billy Joe Davidson
1951**



BIG AND GOOD. Major league scouts are camping around Marion, N. C., hopeful of getting the inside track to the future services of Billy Joe Davidson, giant young south-paw pitcher who at 16 stands 8:03 and weighs 215. In American Legion junior baseball this summer, he allowed only 18 hits and 6 runs in 11 games. In a no-hit performance he fanned 25. The Cleveland Indians are one of the interested clubs.

Davidson remained close with Oak Ridge Military Academy and is a member of their Hall of Fame ... on March 5, 2009, after several years of declining health, he dies at the age of 75 in Greensboro.

Davidson Chronology

July 14, 1949

The pitching star of the Marion (N.C.) American Legion team, Davidson strikes out 25 in a 7-0 no-hit victory over Boone.

June 21, 1950

Davidson is named MVP of the seventh annual high school baseball all-star game between North Carolina and South Carolina ... he pitches three hitless innings and strikes out eight of the nine batters he faces in a 4-0 victory.

September 5, 1950

Davidson allows two hits and strikes out 22 to lead McColls, S.C., to a 1-0 victory over Salisbury in the North Carolina Invitational Semi-pro Baseball Tournament at McCrary Park in Asheboro, North Carolina.

May 29, 1951

The Cleveland Indians sign Davidson for a reported \$150,000 ... Indians' General Manager Hank Greenberg flies to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to personally oversee the signing ceremony.

June 11, 1951

The Indians send Davidson to the Quad City Tigers of the Three-I League to begin his professional baseball career ... with his arrival, the B-level league can boast of having five "bonus babies" on its rosters - Davidson,

Davidson still dreams about a lost career

Greensboro News & Record, September 1, 1983

His dream of playing in the (major) leagues may have had a premature ending on an intramural field at Oak Ridge, where he once threw baseballs over 90 mph.

To this day he believes a pair of football cleats he talked his father into buying so I could run better in tag football ultimately took away the fastball that once compared to Feller's. The cleats caught in the turf, and he twisted his knee in 1950.

"I didn't realize the extent of my injury at the time," Davidson said, "and it didn't seem to affect my success in semipro ball the following summer although my knee kept slipping out."

"We'd just put it back and keep going. But all the time the ligaments and tendons were being stretched and they gradually lost most of their elasticity."

Billy Joe Davidson [3 of 3]:

Ted Kazanski (Phillies, \$80,000), Bill Tuttle (Tigers, \$75,000), J.W. Porter (White Sox, \$60,000) and Floyd Penfold (White Sox, \$40,000).

June 14, 1951 ▶▶

Davidson makes his professional baseball debut pitching for the Cedar Rapids Indians, on June 14, 1951, against the Quad-City Tigers in a Three-I game ... Davidson allows three runs on four walks, a wild pitch and a single in a one inning relief stint in a 7-2 loss. "I was scared, I guess."

June 18, 1951

Davidson makes his second appearance of the season, allowing two runs in three innings of relief work in an 11-inning 3-2 loss to the Waterloo White Hawks.

Billy Joe Davidson Goes Down One Notch On Diamond Ladder

CEDAR RAPIDS (P) — Billy Joe Davidson, reportedly the highest priced bonus rookie in history, took a step down the baseball ladder today.

The Cedar Rapids club said that Davidson has been sent to Ft. Smith, another Cleveland farm club, in the Class C western association. He had won only one game, against four losses, at Cedar Rapids.

The decision to drop Billy Joe a notch was reached after a conference with Herold (Muddy) Ruel, Cleveland farm director who was in Cedar Rapids over the week-end.

Davidson, a sensation in high school and junior college ball in North Carolina, was signed by Cleveland General Manager Hank Greenberg.

The bonus price was estimated to be as high as \$120,000, but both Greenberg and Ruel have denied it was that high.

◀◀ August 6, 1951

Saddled with a 1-4 mark and a 7.00 ERA, Davidson, at his own request, is optioned to Fort Smith of the Western Association.

August 10, 1951

When Davidson arrives in Fort Smith, Arkansas, its 102 degrees and he observes, "This kind of climate is just what can bring out a fast ball. It was kinda cold in Iowa." ... Davidson fairs better at Fort Smith going 3-4 with a 4.25 ERA.

May 29, 1953 ▶▶

Pitching for the Reading Indians of the Eastern (A) League, Davidson hurls his only professional baseball no-hitter in a 3-0 victory over visiting Williamsport ... he walks five and strikes out 10 in picking up his first win against two losses.

October 14, 1954

Davidson is sold to the San Diego Padres of the Pacific Coast League ... Padre President Bill Starr, in announcing the outright purchase says, "Hank Greenberg (Cleveland

general manager) tells me Davidson is a better pitcher than Sacramento's Bud Daley." (Daley, a future major leaguer, was 13-8 with a 2.80 ERA for the Salons)

November 1956

Davidson is on the list of eligible players for the annual minor league draft to be held in Jacksonville, Florida, December 5-6 ... the draft list reveals that Davidson still has a \$15,000 bonus coming if he makes a major league roster.

June 25, 1957

Davidson announces his retirement from professional baseball.

October 8, 1958

The Sporting News reports that Davidson, "is working out in the backyard of his Marion (N.C.) home, hopeful of a comeback."

Billy Joe Davidson In Inauspicious Debut

Davenport, Ia., June 14 (AP)--The sheepish grin faded to a glum pout—the hulking redhead hadn't made good in his first appearance in organized baseball.

"Aw, heck," moaned Billy Joe Davidson, \$120,000 "bonus baby" the Cleveland Indians sent Cedar Rapids' Three-I farm for seasoning. I let 'em down tonight."

Davidson had just made an inauspicious opening in the professional ranks by giving the Quad-City Tigers three runs on four walks, a wild pitch and a single in one inning relief stint last night. The Tigers took the game 7-2.

"I was scared, I guess," the Marion, N. C., prep star explained. "I thought I could grove the ball in there, but I tightened up and jerked every time I threw."

Billy Joe Davidson Fashions No-Hitter

Reading, Pa., May 29 **A**—Billy Joe Davidson, who received a reported \$125,000 bonus from the Cleveland Indians, pitched a no-hit, no-run game tonight as Reading blanked Williamsport, 3-0, in a class A Eastern League game.

Davidson walked five but struck out 10 in winning his first against two losses for the Cleveland farm club. No Williamsport runner reached second base.

It was the first nine-inning, no-hit, no-run game in the Eastern League since Maury McDermott, now with the Boston Red Sox, turned the trick July 14, 1945.

Davidson had a 16-8 record last year with Spartanburg of the class B Tri-State League.