

Hack Wilson, "Martinsburg is a long way from Chicago"

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How far did Hack Wilson fall, and how fast?

In 1930, he set an enduring big league record for runs batted in (191), yet five years later he labored in the minors.

In 1931, he was the highest paid player in the National League in salary (\$33,000), yet four years later he earned \$3,000 from the Albany Senators.

It is estimated that Wilson earns more than a quarter of a million dollars in his 12-year major league career, yet on November 23, 1948, he dies penniless in Baltimore, Maryland.

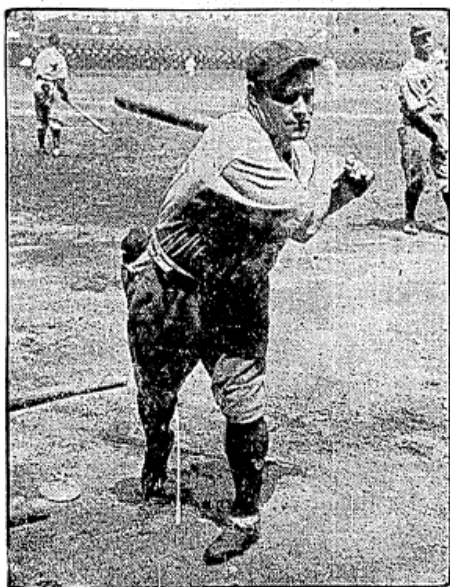
According to his obituary in the *Sporting News*, National League president Ford Frick pays \$350 to cover Wilson's funeral expenses ... buried four days later in his hometown of Martinsburg, West Virginia, the suit he wears in his coffin is donated by the undertaker.

In 1930, playing for the Chicago Cubs, Wilson has one of the most remarkable offensive seasons in major league history, hitting .356, setting a National League record with 56 home runs and driving in 191 runs for a major-league record that will likely stand the test of time.

A prodigious drinker, Wilson, by his own admission comes back for the 1931 season over-weight and out of shape and it is said that the genesis of his downfall began that off-season when his weight begins to out-distance his batting average.

Wilson is born in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, on April 26, 1900, on the same day that Johns Hopkins University, despite a recent win over the Yale Law School, drops baseball from its list of sports because of a lack of interest on the part of team members and the difficulties of obtaining practice fields.

Released Outright



"HACK" WILSON

Described by one sportswriter as being "shaped like a beer barrel and not wholly unfamiliar with its contents." Wilson, although just 5-foot-6 in height, has an 18" neck and weighs close to 200 pounds as a rookie ... playing 12 years in the major leagues with the New York Giants (1923-25), Chicago Cubs (1926-31), Brooklyn Dodgers (1932-34) and Philadelphia Phillies (1934), Wilson finishes with a .307 lifetime batting average, 244 home runs and 1,063 runs batted in.

Inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame by the Veteran's Committee in 1979, Wilson has one of the greatest seasons in baseball annals in 1930, hitting .356 with 54 home runs and 191 RBIs, leading the Cubs to a second-place finish, two games behind the St. Louis Cardinals.

Wilson's 54 home runs will stand as the National League record for 68 years until Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa both eclipse the mark in 1998, while his 191 RBIs is one of the longest-standing major league records.

1935 Martinsburg (WVa) Blue Sox



Front Row, Left to Right: Chuck Kilmer, 1B; Carlton Johnson, OF; Lee Denton, 3B; Hartgel Ambrose, 1B; Hunter Lamp, 2B; Dullier Brumbaugh, Bat Boy; Haywood Ledereck, SS; Hack Wilson, OF/Manager; Buddy Hesson, C; Buck Stevens, C.

Back Row, Left to Right: Wesley Rice, Treasurer; Claude "Hop" Caske, P; Corky Ingram, P; Sewel Roberts, P; Reggie Rawlings, OF; Paul Stotler, Business Manager; Bill Ambrose, INF; Harry Brundle, OF; Wesley McDonald, INF; George Walker, President.

Hack Wilson "1935" [2 of 5]:

While with the Cubs, Wilson leads the National League in home runs four times and RBIs twice ... his major league career comes to an end on September 4, 1934, when the Philadelphia Phillies give him his unconditional release.

Wilson - The Final Year

August 25, 1934
Forbes Field, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

| PHILADELPHIA— | | AB | R | H | O | A | E |
|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|
| Bartel, ss | 5 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Chiozza, 2b | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| xL. Wilson | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Haslin, 2b | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Allen, lf | 6 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| J. Moore, rf | 5 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Camilli, 1b | 5 | 1 | 2 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| J. Wilson, c | 5 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| G. Davis, cf | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Walters, 3b | 5 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| E. Moore, p | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Johnson, p | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Collins, p | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 45 | 12 | 18 | 37 | 15 | 0 | 0 |
| PITTSBURGH— | | AB | R | H | O | A | E |
| L. Waner, cf | 6 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| P. Waner, rf | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lindstrom, lf | 4 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Vaughan, ss | 5 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Suhr, 1b | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Thevenow, 3b | 5 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Lavagetto, 2b | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grace, c | 3 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Swift, p | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Smith, p | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Chagnon, p | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| xxJensen | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Blrkofer, p | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| French, p | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| xxxLucas | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 41 | 8 | 15 | 37 | 6 | 0 | 0 |

xxJensen batted for Chagnon in 8th.
xxxBatted for French in 8th.
Philadelphia . . . 010 000 182—12
Pittsburgh 100 002 050— 8

◀◀ August 25, 1934

In his final at bat in the major leagues, Wilson, pinch-hitting for second baseman Lou Chiozza (who is 3-for-5 with two RBIs), singles home two runs with a ninth-inning single off of Pittsburgh's Larry French in a 12-8 Phillies' win.

September 4, 1934 ▶▶

Wilson has only two singles in 20 at bats in seven games when Philadelphia gives the 34-year-old outfielder his unconditional release with five weeks still remaining in the regular season ... the seventh-place Phillies (47-79) also release 36-year-old outfielder Harvey Hendrick and pitcher Cy Malis ... Malis makes his only major league appearance (August 17) for Philadelphia in 1934 and he is one of only three pitchers (Charlie Faust, John Rheinecker) to get hit by a pitch in his only career plate appearance.

Phillies Can Hack Wilson

Once League's Hardest Hitter Loses His Month-Old Job

January 15, 1935 ▶▶

The International League's Albany Senators sign Wilson to a contract for the 1935 season for a reported \$3,000.

Hack Wilson Gets Albany Contract

ALBANY, N. Y., Jan. 15 (AP).—Hack Wilson, former major league outfielder, has signed a contract to play with the Albany Senators in the International League, it was announced Tuesday.

The former home run king of the National League will leave for Hot Springs, Ark., at once to get into condition. He was made a free agent following his release by the Philadelphia Nationals last season.

Hack Wilson, who drew down \$33,000 for leading the major league in home runs with 56 while with the Cubs in 1930 and also won that year's most valuable player award, will receive exactly \$30,000 less as an outfielder for the Albany Internationals this season.

March 11, 1935

Wilson is one of three new players to report to the Albany Senators' spring training camp at the Gulfport, Mississippi, Fair Grounds ... joining a "slimmed down" Wilson are pitcher Joe Caviston and infielder Frank Packard.

Former Swat Monarchs



Babe Ruth (right) and Hack Wilson, former home run kings of the American and National leagues, respectively, leaving the field together in Albany, N.Y., after Wilson had tripped over Ruth's leg on a dash to first in the game between Boston Braves and Albany Senators. Both returned to the game later.

Wilson arrives from his home in Martinsburg, West Virginia in the morning and immediately dons a uniform in an effort to work off a few more pounds ... Wilson tells team management that he has already lost "about" 20 pounds during a five-week stay at Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Wilson says that he and Albany owner Joe Cambria are "great friends" and that getting back into the major leagues is his goal, "Sure I think I will get another chance in the big leagues. I feel better this year than I ever have."

◀◀ April 22, 1935

Wilson and Boston Braves first baseman Babe Ruth - two future Hall of Famers with 16 home run titles to their names - collide with one another in the bottom of the first inning of an exhibition game between Albany and the Boston Braves ... running out a ground ball to shortstop, Wilson trips over Ruth's leg and turns a complete somersault ... assisted by Ruth, Wilson goes to the Senators' dugout, but later returns to the game ... Ruth has two doubles and draws a walk in five innings of play as Boston wins 10-4.

Hack Wilson "1935" [3 of 5]:

Hack Wilson Has Average of .474

Albany Slugger's Average Highest in the International League

May 3

After missing most the season's first week, Wilson returns to the Albany lineup and bats his way into the International League batting lead with a .474 mark with 12 hits in 25 trips to the plate.

May 19

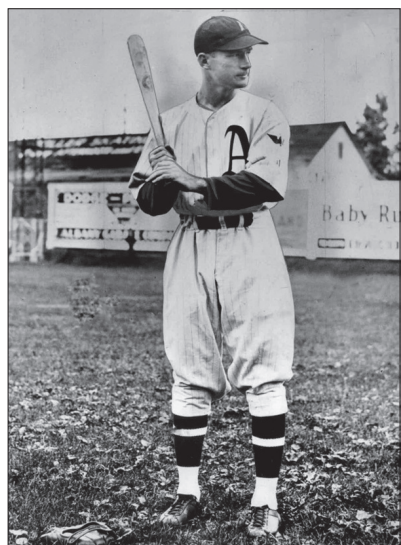
New York Yankees manager Joe McCarthy expresses an interest in the progress of Wilson who is hitting .404 with with 13 RBIs in 16 games for Albany.

What they are saying about Hack in 1935

The report around the International is that Hack Wilson knows every milk-shake mixer around the circuit by his first name.

Hack Wilson, big as a cross-country bus, is on a reducing diet of milk shakes as part of his campaign to get back in the majors.

Some time before the season ends Hack Wilson, the pudgy home run hitter who once led the National League, will join Portland.



Edwin Collins "Alabama" Pitts
1935 Albany Senators

◀◀ May 22

Wilson is batting .398 when Albany general manager Johnny Evers goes to Sing-Sing Prison in Ossining, New York to sign Edward "Alabama" Pitts to a \$200 a month contract ... sentenced for to 8-to-16 years for second-degree robbery, Pitts is a standout athlete on the prison's athletic teams.

June 4

Pitts is banned from playing professional baseball by W.C. Bramham, president of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues.

"We all have a natural tendency to help the fellow who is down. But we think the public would resent the signing of this player in organized baseball." -- W.C. Bramham

June 6

Pitts is released from prison with \$58 dollars in his pocket and offers from the House of David baseball team and the Philadelphia Eagles of the NFL should Bramham's ban remain in place.

June 17

Baseball Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis overrules Bramham and allows Pitts to play in regular season games, but not exhibitions.

June 23

Pitts makes his professional baseball debut for the Albany Senators in a doubleheader against the visiting Syracuse Chiefs ... a season-high 7,752 fans watch Pitts, who starts in center field both games, go 2-for-8 with a run scored and and RBI ... little notice is given that the highly-paid Wilson goes 0-for-4 in the opener and is 0-for-1 as a pinch hitter in the nightcap.

June 27 ▶▶

Made expendable by the signing and fan appeal of Pitts, Wilson, the Senators' highest-paid player, is sold, or optioned (depending who you believe), to the Portland Beavers of the Pacific Coast League.

Wilson is batting .263 with three home runs and 29 RBIs in 59 games for Albany ... the Beavers acquire the aging star in an effort to stimulate attendance and assure fans that the team is doing everything it can to win in the tough PCL ... to make room for Wilson on the roster, the Beavers give 22-year-old catcher Hal Doerr his unconditional release.

Meet a New Portland Beaver



Hack Wilson "1935" [4 of 5]:

July 2 ▶▶

An angry Albany Senators manager Al Mamaux explains that Hack Wilson was "optioned" to the Portland Beavers, not "sold" as was reported ... meanwhile in Portland, team officials began to worry about their erstwhile outfielder when it is reported that he is still in Albany five days after the trade.

Hack Wilson Just Optioned to Coast Outfit, Not Sold

Syracuse, N. Y., July 2 (AP).—Al Mamaux, manager of the Albany club of the International league, declared Tuesday night that Hack Wilson, former National league home run king, had been optioned to the Portland club of the Pacific Coast league last week.

Report from Portland was that he had been purchased.

Wilson Undecided About Joining Up With Beaver Nine

MARTINSBURG, W. Va., July 3 (AP).—Husky Hack Wilson, home-run king of the majors in 1929, said today he is undecided about joining up with Portland in the Pacific Coast league.

The veteran outfielder was optioned to the western club last week by Albany of the International league.

Hack denied reports that he had refused to go to Portland, but added that he was negotiating with the club and that his decision would hinge on the outcome of the negotiations.

Wilson, who cracked out 56 homers in 1929, said he had been in a slump and that when Albany started retrenchment measures he was the first to go. He was one of the highest-paid players in the club.

◀◀ July 3

Wilson denies reports that he is refusing to report to Portland, but adds that he is "negotiating" with the Beavers and that his decision would "hinge" on the outcome of the negotiations.

July 6

Wilson remains at his home in Martinsburg, West Virginia, as he awaits word from the Portland Beavers on his request to have his transportation costs (to and from the Coast) covered.

July 10

Wilson says that he has received an offer to manage a Mid-Atlantic League team, however he declines to reveal which Mid-Atlantic League team is "seeking his services." ... Dr. D. D. Haniel of the Beckley Miners, states that his organization has made no overtures to Wilson ... the Johnstown Johnnies are in between managers.

July 20

Wilson announces that he is a free agent as the option on his services is returned by the Portland Beavers back to Albany ... however, he says he has no major league prospects at the time.

July 28 ▶▶

Returning to the playing field for his hometown Martinsburg Blue Sox, Wilson has a double and a two-run first-inning home run in a 7-5 win over Hagerstown in a Blue Ridge League game.

August 12

Wilson is officially named manager of the Martinsburg Blue Sox of the Blue Ridge League.

Semi-Pros Offer Old Hack \$5,000

By The Associated Press.
CHICAGO, April 1.—Hack Wilson, the pudgy outfielder who used to bust fences for the Chicago Cubs, had a \$5,000 invitation to return to Chicago baseball today—on a sandlot scale.

William G. Harley, manager of the Chicago Mills semi-pro team, telegraphed Wilson at the former major leaguer's home in Martinsburg, W. Va., the offer of a \$5,000 contract to play with the Mills this season.

August 22

Playing for a Shenandoah County League All-Star team, Wilson is 1-for-4 with a first inning double and an RBI in an 8-7 loss to Harrisonburg.

August 24

Batting fourth and playing centerfield for the Blue Sox, Wilson takes his hacks at the plate going 0-for-3 and striking out twice in a 10-0 loss to the Chesapeake West Pointers.

◀◀ March 31, 1936

Chicago Mills manager William G. Hartley offers Wilson \$5,000 to play with the semipro team in 1936.

Wilson's Hitting Defeats Blue Sox

The big bat of Hack Wilson turned back the Hagerstown Blue Sox yesterday by a 7 to 5 score. The former home run king of the National League drove out a circuit clout in the opening inning with a mate on base and in the seventh he doubled to drive in another run. His other two appearances at the plate drew him bases on balls.

Reggie Rawlings doubled in one of his two appearances at bat. Rinehart and Orcutt each had three hits out of five times up for the locals, while Hays hit a long home run over the center field fence.

Hagerstown 101 000 021—5 9 4
Martinsburg 300 020 11x—7 8 3

Young, Kline, Jacobs, Brooks and Myers; Casket and Hasson.

The Sporting News
December 8, 1948 - Page 19

Hat Passed in Saloon for Wilson Burial Fund

National League Contributed \$350 to Fund;
Floral Piece From McCarthy Among Tributes

By EDWIN A. LAHEY
Of the Chicago Daily News

BALTIMORE, Md.

Wallace Jaco, the night attendant at the Mitchell Undertaking Parlor, seemed pleased to have his lonely vigil interrupted when I rang the buzzer and asked if Hack Wilson's body was there.

"You bet," he said brightly. "Want to see him? Come on in."

We walked down a long corridor and turned into a dark little room. Jaco snapped a light switch and said triumphantly:

"Here he is."

This shrunken frame in a gray mortuary suit was all that was left of the man who was a hero with his name in 96-point type when he was slapping home runs for the Chicago Cubs. Such a lusty hero he was in those days that any Chicago speakeasy proprietor was proud to have him break up the joint.

Hack made \$250,000 in baseball, but they passed the hat on North Avenue in Baltimore to have services for him, November 27.

The National League, in which Hack Wilson's home run record still stands, sent Undertaker John Mitchell \$350 for Hack's funeral expenses. But the mahogany box in which Hack was laid out cost \$370, Jaco explained. (The box was the only bit of elegance connected with the passing of the former hero of Wrigley Field.)

Mitchell laid out Hack for free, the suit included.

Some money for services also was raised by rattling the cup in neighborhood saloons, in some of which Hack had tended bar in recent years, but where more often he was to be found staring into the bottom of the glass and reviewing silently the days of his glory.

"We'll have enough left over for a tombstone," grunted a bartender later in the Linden Grill.

The midnight visitor at the undertaking parlor, scanning the Western Union money order sent by the National League, asked whether \$350 was not a rather modest sum.

"Well," said Jaco, recognizing the facts of life. "I guess maybe that's all the fellow who notified the league about Hack's death asked for."

'One of the Fellows on the Corner'

Jaco knew Hack well as one of the "fellows on the corner." He recalled that Hack had been on a radio program, "We, the People," only a week before his death.

"He came right out and told kids not to follow in his tracks," said Jaco. "From what I understand he really gave a story."

There was the traditional guest book in the little room where Hack was laid out. About 60 names were entered, none of them known to the writer. Apparently the "fellows from around the corner."

There were four floral pieces around the mahogany casket early on the morning of the day before the services. One was from Joe McCarthy, two others were from people in Martinsburg, W. Va., Garland Dunn and Buddy Sullivan. The fourth was from "Al's Corner, his friends."

On Jaco's night desk there was another wire, in addition to the National League's money order for \$350. It was from Al Schacht, the baseball clown, urging the undertaker to wire him collect if any financial assistance were needed.

In the saloons on North Avenue, in the neighborhood where Wilson had roomed and drunk for the last several years, the record was cloudy.

"He was a good guy."

"He never talked about his son. He never talked about anything."

"He never hung on to a buck. He drank it all up."

"But anyway," said the rather unfriendly bartender, who had estimated that there would be enough left over for a tombstone, "anyway, Hack's getting buried."



Hack Wilson

November 23, 1948

Lewis Robert "Hack" Wilson dies at the City Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, from internal hemorrhages and a pulmonary condition ... brought to the hospital by friends the previous night, Wilson is 48 years old at the time of his death.

AH, FOR THE LIFE OF A BALL PLAYER



These four prominent members of the diamond profession recently met under the warm sun of Hot Springs, Ark., and between strokes at the pellet no doubt told each other what they would do the coming season. Left to right—Dizzy Dean, well known Cardinal; Fat Malone, another Red Bird; Paul Dean, Dizzy's brother, and pudgy Hack Wilson, now of Albany in the International league.