

Allen Benson, "The Human Mulberry Bush"

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On August 19, 1934, Washington Senators pitcher and House of David alumnus Allen (Bullet Ben) Benson becomes the first full-bearded player in 50 years to take the field in a major league game when he ascends the mound against the last-place Chicago White Sox on a humid Sunday afternoon in Washington's Griffith Stadium.

**SOX SEND BENSON
TO BARBER; WHIP
SENATORS, 9 TO 8**

One of 39 South Dakota-born players to play in the major leagues, Benson gets the starting nod from Senators' manager Joe Cronin and pitches into the eighth inning against the White Sox before leaving with a blistered finger. Chicago scores two runs in the top of the ninth inning off of reliever Alex McColl to post a 9-8 come from behind win.

Benson's final line for the afternoon is seven earned runs allowed on nine hits, four strikeouts and five walks in 7 2/3 innings. Seven days later, the Hurley, S.D., native makes his second, and last, major league appearance yielding seven runs on 10 hits in only two innings of work in a 9-5 loss.

Signed a week earlier as the first player inked by Washington super scout Joe Cambria, Benson faces skepticism from the media and teammates alike. The local baseball scribes charge that his signing is just another "sceme" by Senators' owner Clark Griffith to increase attendance while his teammates are reportedly upset with his whiskers.

In his two starts, Benson pitches 9 2/3 innings, allowing 19 hits, five walks and striking out four for an 0-1 record and a 12.10 ERA. On August 27, one day after his second appearance, Benson is sent to the Albany Senators of the International (AA) League. Benson does not report to Albany, electing instead to return home to Hurley.



Allen Benson
Washington Senators
Griffith Stadium, Washington, D.C.
August 19, 1934

Allen Benson Year by Year:

Year	Team	League	Level	W-L	GP	INN	H	BB	SO	ERA	
1927	House of David	--	-	18-5	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1927	Dallas Steers	Texas	A	2-1	5	23	26	3	4	2.74	
1928	2 Teams	2 Leagues	C-B	8-16	38	192.0	208	55	62	--	
1928	Akron Tyrites	Central	B	4-10	28	126.0	136	42	39	3.57	
1928	Charleoi Babes	Middle Atlantic	C	4-6	10	66.2	72	13	23	4.32	
1929	2 Teams	2 Leagues	B-AA	12-8	38	225.0	251	100	89	4.92	
1929	Akron Tyrites	Central	B	12-7	35	209.0	222	94	89	4.65	
1929	Minneapolis Millers	American Association	AA	0-1	3	16.0	29	6	-	8.44	
1930	Hurley (S.D.) Cowboys	Independent	SPro	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1931	Sioux City Stockyards	Independent	SPro	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1932	Des Moines Demons	Western	A	1-0	2	11.0	9	3	5	4.09	
1932	Minneapolis Millers	American Association	AA	0-0	2	-	-	-	-	--	
1932	Sioux City Stockyards	Independent	SPro	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1933	House of David	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1934	House of David	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1934	Washington Senators	American	MLB	0-1	2	9.2	19	5	4	12.10	
1934	Hurley (S.D.) Cowboys	Independent	SPro	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1935	2 Teams	2 Leagues	A-AA	9-11	27	126.0	132	46	-	--	
1935	Albany Senators	International	AA	1-2	6	-	-	-	-	--	
1935	Harrisburg Senators	New York-Penn	A	8-9	21	126.0	132	46	-	3.07	
Major League Totals				1 Season	0-1	2	9.2	19	5	4	12.10
Minor League Totals				4 Seasons	33-36	110	584.0	636	209	128	--

ML Debut: August 19, 1934 at Griffith Stadium, Washington: starting pitcher for Washington in a 9-7 loss to the Chicago White Sox; allowed seven runs (all earned) in 7 2/3 innings on nine hits, five walks and four strikeouts (no decision)
ML Finale: August 26, 1934 at Griffith Stadium, Washington: starting pitcher for Washington in a 9-5 loss to the St. Louis Browns; allowed seven runs (all earned) in 7 2/3 innings on 10 hits, no walks and no strikeouts (losing pitcher; 0-1)

Later, Benson would express regret about being known only for his beard while with the Senators:

"I believe I could have made the grade with the Nats but for these danged whiskers. I want to cut 'em off right now, but Mr. Cambria says they make me a drawing card - a sorta circus attraction - and that I've gotta wear 'em for the rest of the season. But I'll tell you one thing, they're coming off just as soon as the season ends, and when I report to Albany next spring, I'll be looking like the rest of the gang."
 - Allen Benson

Benson makes his professional debut with the Dallas Steers on August 21, 1927, with a seven-hit complete game win over the San Antonio Bears.

Allen Benson [2 of 6]:

Editor's Note: It's been written that Benson pitched one game with the Texas (A) League Waco Cubs in 1925. That information is incorrect. The Benson that pitches three innings for Waco on July 1, is Jerry Benson, a University of Michigan star.

The August 23, 1934, issue of *The Sporting News* also reports that he pitched for Waterloo Hawks of the Mississippi Valley (D) League earlier in the year.



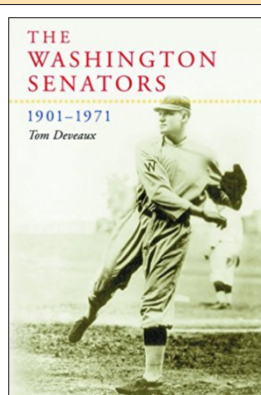
1933 House of David Barnstorming Team

Over the next two seasons (1928-1929), Benson compiles a 22-24 mark pitching for three different minor league teams ranging from the Akron Tyrites, Charleroi Babes to the Minneapolis Millers of the American (AA) Association.

Prior to the start of the 1930 season, Benson informs the Millers that he is quitting the game. Team officials travel to Hurley, where he owns a farm, but are unable to talk him in to returning to the team.

The bearded one resurfaces again in early 1932 with the Des Moines Demons of the Western (A) League where he pitches a complete game victory in the season opener.

Benson spends most of 1933 and 1934 pitching for the barnstorming House of David team. Washington scout Joe Cambria signs Benson to a contract after seeing him pitch against Albany regulars in a "batting drill" and the rest is history.



Following is an excerpt from Tom Deveau's book "The Washington Senators, 1901-1971."

"How bad had things gotten? Bad enough that Allen Benson, a member of the House of David baseball team, was signed by [Clark] Griffith in an effort to boost fan interest in his

sagging franchise. The House of David team consisted of good amateur players who toured the country, playing teams of local all-stars wherever they went. Their gimmick, apart from playing good baseball, was that every member of the club wore a long beard.

Griffith thought that might work well at Griffith Stadium, and Benson, known as "Bullet Ben," attracted a large Sunday crowd on August 19, 1934. He was battered about by the league-leading Tigers, but apparently not so badly that Griffith wouldn't give him another shot. Slated to next appear against the St. Louis Browns, Benson begged the owner to let him shave his beard so that he wouldn't feel like he was making such a spectacle of himself. Griffith insisted that if the beard went, Bullet Ben would have to go too. So the pitcher relented and was trounced by the Browns as well."

August 21, 1927
Steer Stadium, Dallas, Texas
Dallas Steers 8, San Antonio Bears 1

S. Antonio	AB	R	H	PO	A	E
Harris, s. s....	3	0	1	2	2	0
Klein, c. f....	3	0	1	0	0	0
Philbin, 2 b....	3	0	0	5	2	0
Phipps, r. f....	3	0	0	1	0	0
Najo, l. f....	2	0	0	1	0	0
Leslie, 1 b....	3	0	1	6	0	0
Olle, 3 b....	2	0	0	1	2	1
Grisenbeck, c....	3	0	1	2	0	1
Lindsey, p....	2	0	1	0	2	1
Moose	1	1	1	0	0	0
Sears	1	0	1	0	0	0
Fillingim	1	0	0	0	0	0
Arzatti	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total.....	27	1	7	18	9	3

Dallas	AB	R	H	PO	A	E
Morse, 2 b....	3	1	2	3	1	0
Sanguinet, c. f....	4	0	0	3	0	0
Drester, l. f....	3	1	1	3	0	0
Billings, c....	2	1	1	2	0	0
Riley, 1 b....	2	2	1	6	0	0
Bagwell, r. f....	3	1	1	2	0	0
Tate, 3 b....	3	0	0	0	2	0
Gross, s. s....	3	2	1	1	2	0
Benson, p....	3	0	1	1	0	1
Total.....	26	8	9	21	5	1

San Antonio000 000 1--1
Dallas114 002 *-8
Two-base hits—Morse, Lindsey.
Stolen bases—Billings, Harris. Sac-
rifice hits—Tate, Billings. Struck
out—By Benson 1. Lindsey 1.
Bases on balls—By Lindsey 7.
Wild pitch—By Lindsey. Left on
bases—Dallas 8. San Antonio 5.
Double play—Morse to Gross to
Riley. Passed ball—By Grisen-
beck. Time of game—1 hour and
30 minutes. Umpire—Griggs and
Gaddy

Almost a year to the day of his major league debut with the Washington Senators, Benson's baseball career comes to an end when he suffers a fracture at the base of his spinal column during a collision at home plate in the fourth inning of a New York-Penn League game with Binghamton.

Benson returns to his farm in Hurley, S.D., where he lives until his death on November 16, 1999, at the age of 94.

BENSON CHRONOLOGY

◀ August 21, 1927 – Professional Debut

A 19-year-old Allen Benson, sent by Manager Jones of the House of David team to the Dallas Steers, makes his professional baseball debut one to remember, pitching a seven-hit complete game 8-1 win over the visiting San Antonio Bears in the second game of a Texas (A) League game.

"To make it worse, a House of David pitcher who has shaved off his long whiskers came near shutting them out in the second affair. The young man's name is Allen Benson, he's a right-hander, only 19 years old, and they say he looks the goods, no kidding. Dallas got him direct from his Michigan home, where a scout signed him after seeing him play ball with the famous whiskered nine that once upon a time called Ben King."



Dallas Steers - 1927

After playing for the House of David touring baseball team, Benson will pitch five games for the Dallas Steers in 1927 ... the 21-year-old right-hander walks only three men in 23 innings and finish the season 2-1 with a 3.74 ERA.

Allen Benson [3 of 6]:

January 28, 1928

Benson is one of 11 pitchers on the Dallas Steer's official roster submitted to the Texas League office.

March 6, 1928

In a six-inning intra-squad Dallas scrimmage, Benson "looks immense" in four innings of work.

April 25, 1928

Sent by Dallas to Akron on the Central (B) League, Benson is named the Tyrites' opening day starter by manager "Honest" John McClosky ... despite pitching the last five innings with a blood blister, Benson strikes out two, allows six hits and walks six in a complete game 3-1 win.

May 2, 1928

On the mound for the third time in nine days, Benson no-hits visiting Erie through the first six innings but weakens in the seventh allowing the Sailors to score four runs in a 4-3 setback.



Akron Tyrites - 1928

The opening day starter for Akron of the Central (B) League, Benson is 4-10 in 28 games with a 4.71 ERA ... sent to Charleroi on August 3, he returns to the Tyrites 30 days later ... in his full season, Benson is 8-16 in 192 innings pitched.



Charleroi Babes - 1928

Acquired on August 3, 1928, from the Akron Tyrites, Benson pitches in 10 games in 28 days for the Charleroi Babes ... after winning his first three decisions in complete game fashion, Benson loses six of his last games.

April 25, 1928
Lakeside Stadium, Canton Ohio
Akron Tyrites 3, Canton Terriers 1

Akron	AB.	R.	BH.	PO.	A.	E.
Comstock, cf	5	0	1	3	0	0
Ryan, 3b	5	0	1	2	2	1
Thompson, rf	3	0	1	2	0	0
McDougall, lf	4	0	0	1	0	0
Mallon, 2b	2	1	0	5	4	1
Honeyman, 1b	4	1	1	11	0	1
McKay, ss	4	0	1	0	0	0
Benn, c	1	0	0	3	3	0
Benson, p	3	0	0	0	3	0

Canton	AB.	R.	BH.	PO.	A.	E.
Layden, cf	4	0	1	3	0	0
Johnson, 2b	4	0	1	4	3	2
Feigert, rf	4	1	2	1	0	0
Corl, 3b	4	0	1	3	3	0
Grimm, ss	2	0	0	1	4	1
Miller, lf	3	0	0	2	0	0
Agler, 1b	1	0	1	10	0	0
O'Connell, c	2	0	0	3	3	0
Meis, p	3	0	0	0	2	1
Ashley, x	1	0	0	0	0	0

Totals 31 2 5 27 12 3
 Totals 28 1 6 27 15 4
 x-batted for Meis in 9th.
 Akron 000 200 000-2
 Canton 000 001 000-1
 Two base hit—Agler. Sacrifices—Grimm, Miller, Thompson, Benn 2. Stolen bases—Meis, Comstock 2, McDougall and Mallon. Hit by pitched ball—Benson. Double plays—Meis to Corl to Agler; Honeyman, unassisted; Ryan to Mallon to Honeyman; Comstock, unassisted. Bases on balls—Off Benson 6; Meis 3. Struck out—Benson, 2; Meis, 2. Passed balls—Benn, 1. Umpires—Davis and Slaven.

August 3, 1928

Benson is 4-10 with a 3.57 ERA for Akron when he is released on option to the Charleroi Babes of the Middle Atlantic (C) League ... starting center fielder Warwick Comstock, who is batting .303, is also released for "reasons of economy."

August 5, 1928

Making his first start for Charleroi, Benson allows only eight hits and strikes out three in a 6-3 complete game win over the Cumberland Colts.

September 5, 1928

Following a 30-day hiatus, Benson to Akron from Charleroi - where pitched 10 games in 28 days and is 0-for-1 as a ninth-inning pinch hitter in a 9-7 loss to the Dayton Aviators.

May 31, 1929

Benson hits the first of two career home runs when he hits a grand slam as a pinch hitter in the ninth inning in a 12-6 loss to the Fort Wayne Chiefs.

August 20, 1929

Playing before the smallest home crowd in two years, and a pair of Cleveland scouts, Benson scatters eight hits in a route-going 7-to-4 decision over the visiting Dayton Aviators.

August 21, 1929

One day following his complete game win over Dayton, Benson is sold to the Minneapolis Millers of the American (AA) Association.

March 11, 1930

Listed on Minneapolis' pre-season roster, a recently-married Benson informs the team that he is quitting the game ... team officials travel to his hometown of Hurkey, South Dakota, where he owns a large farm, but are unable to talk him in to returning to the team.

POLICE QUELL RIOT OVER BAD UMPIRING

Akron, Ohio (June 24, 1929) - Things turn ugly in the late innings of the Canton-Akron contest when "bad umpiring" by the game's arbiters - Kober and Beck - cause the "first really serious baseball rioting in Akron in years."

Following the game, the umpires are locked by club officials for their own safety in a dressing room until 8:45, when a squadron of police arrived to take the desparate duo to their hotel. During the siege, Akron manager Jack McClosky attempts to dispel the mob by pleading, "A rotten decision or a dozen of them is not worth a life."

"We don't want their lives," someone shouted. "We just want to throw them in the dirty canal."

Allen Benson [4 of 6]:

April 10, 1930

Sioux City, South Dakota, Stock Yards team secretary Fred King announces the signing of pitcher Allen Benson.

April 15, 1930

Benson's contract with Minneapolis is turned over to the Des Moines Demons.

August 25, 1930

Pitching for his hometown Hurley (S.D.) team, Benson out-duels Viborg's Emmett Nelson 1-0 ... Hurley allows four hits and strikes out 17 while Nelson fans 18 and yields only three hits.

Benson Fans 17, Nelson 18 as Hurley Wins 1 to 0

Viborg, Aug. 25.—Hurley's nine defeated Viborg 1 to 0 here Sunday in an old-fashioned pitchers' battle with Allen Benson of Hurley firing against Emmett Nelson, Viborg's own ace. Benson fanned 17 and Nelson 18. There was a total of only 7 hits in the whole game, Hurley getting three and Viborg four. Two errors in the second inning following a single by Lowry gave the game away.

April 11, 1932

The Des Moines Demons announce the acquisition of Chattanooga Lookouts (A Southern Association) outfielder Charley Bates and pitcher Allen Benson from the Minneapolis Millers ... Bates, who had a brief nine-game cup of tea with the Philadelphia Athletics in 1927, has a sensational year with the Demons, hitting .319 with 46 doubles, 14 triples and 14 home runs ... Bates' major league debut on September 22, 1927, was notable as he went 6-for-9 with two doubles, one triple and two RBIs in a doubleheader with the Cleveland Indians.

April 21, 1932

The Western League's 33rd season gets underway with four games involving all eight league clubs ... the largest turnout was at Tulsa where more than 10,000 fans packed the Oilers' brand new Fairgrounds Park to welcome the return of Western League baseball to the city after a two-year hiatus ... the visiting Des Moines Demons, behind the nine-hit pitching of 27-year-old Allen Benson, hand the Oilers a 5-to-2 setback.

May 16, 1932

Benson, 2-0 with Des Moines, is recalled by the Minneapolis Millers.

Senators May Obtain Bewhiskered Pitcher

WASHINGTON, Aug. 13. — The Washington Senators may try to pull themselves out of the depths of the American league by a set of pink whiskers.

Allen Benson, recent star of the House of David team of Benton Harbor, Mich., has been invited by Clark Griffith, Washington President, to work out at the stadium tomorrow and has been told if he produces he will be signed.

Benson was signed two days ago by Joe Cambria of the Albany International league club after he had struck out a dozen men in a night game the House played with the Harrisburg Senators of the New York-Penn League.

Cambria, here today, told Griffith the bewhiskered hurler had promised. Ready to try anything to better the club standing, Griffith asked Benson be sent here for inspection.

June 1, 1932

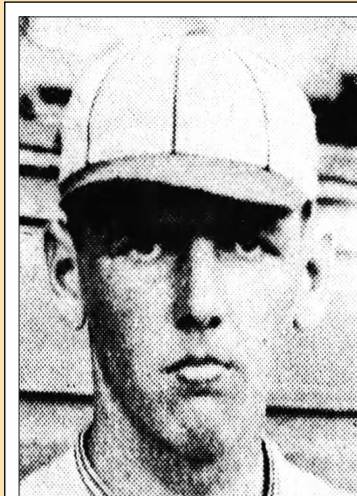
The Minneapolis Millers announce the outright release of 33-year-old infielder Chuck Dressen and pitcher Allen Benson on option to Wilkes-Barre Barons of New York-Pennsylvania (A) League

June 11, 1934

Pitching for the House of David in an exhibition game before 8,000 spectators in St. Louis' Sportsman Park, Benson allows the St. Louis Cardinals only three runs on eight hits but takes the loss in a 3-0 decision ... the loss marks only the second setback in 27 games for the David nine.

"Scribes and fans may laugh at the idea of a diamonder carrying around a mattress on his chin, especially during this hot weather, but Allen Benson, the newest Nat pitcher, who has been the butt of much kidding in this respect, did not cause any loud guffaws yesterday with his flinging when he worked against his mates in pregame practice. Showing a rhythmic movement, fine control, a lot of speed, a good curve and a deceptive change of pace, Benson had all of his mates praising him as a good prospect after his workout.

-Washington Post, August 15, 1934



Minneapolis Millers - 1929

Recalled by the Minneapolis Millers on May 16 1932, from the Des Moines Demons of the Western League, Benson pitches in only two games for the Millers before being sent on option to the Wilkes-Barre Barons of the New York-Penn League.



Allen Benson [5 of 6]:

August 19, 1934 ▶

His eligibility to play with the Nats approved by American League President Will Harridge, Benson makes his major league debut against the Chicago White Sox.



Washington Senators - 1934

One of 17 pitchers to take the mound for the Senators that season, the bearded right-hander will allow 14 runs in 9 2/3 innings on 19 hits and five walks ... following his release, Benson returns to his home in Hurley, S.D.

August 27, 1934

The Washington Senators announce that Benson was being sent to Albany.

"Four of those hits the Browns made off Allen last Sunday were infield ones. He had a stiff right hip—Trainer Mike Martin worked on it only the night before—and so couldn't field 'em as he had a chance to do. I saw him beat the St. Louis Cardinals in an exhibition game last season and I saw him strike out 12 Harrisburg players just before I recommended him to Mr. Griffith. I claim he's got a chance, and I'm going to give it to him."

- Joe Cambria

July 6, 1935

Benson is sent from the Albany Senators to the Harrisburg Senators.

August 10, 1935

Almost a year to the day of his major league debut with the Washington Senators, Benson's professional baseball career comes to an end when he suffers a fracture at the base of his spinal column during a collision at home plate in the fourth inning of a New York-Penn League game with Binghamton ... to add insult to injury, Benson takes the loss in a 3-1 setback.

November 16, 1999

Benson dies in Hurley, S.D., at the age of 94.

**BENSON IS INJURED
IN PLAY AT PLATE**

**Pitcher Suffers Fracture
At Base of Spinal
Column**

The Harrisburg Senators lost the services of their ace hurler last night when Allen Benson was injured to such an extent that he had to be rushed to the Harrisburg Hospital.

Benson's injury, diagnosed as a fracture at the base of his spinal column, happened in the fourth inning of the game with Binghamton last night on the Island field as the Triplets defeated the Senators by a score of 3 to 1.

**Benson, Finger Blistered,
However, Not Loser**

WASHINGTON, Aug. 19—(AP)—The Senator's new House of David moundsman went to the showers today on his initial appearance and Chicago beat Washington 9-8.

But the pink-whiskered Allen Benson was not the losing pitcher. McColl, who hurried to his relief in the eighth, found the Senators still leading at 7-6.

The Griffith management even sent word to the press box—but after the cyclone struck in the eighth—that all along Benson had been chunking with a blistered finger.

CHICAGO (A.)		WASHINGTON (A.)	
abr.h.o.a.		abr.h.o.a.	
Swanson rf	...3 4 2 0 0	Bluege 3b	...5 1 1 0 3
Haas cf	...5 1 1 1 0	Schulte cf	...6 2 3 1 0
Simmons lf	...6 0 4 0 0	Myer 2b	...5 2 3 4 5
Appling ss	...5 1 3 1 3	Cronin ss	...4 1 1 4 5
Dykes 1b	...2 0 1 13 2	Bolton c	...4 1 2 4 0
Hayes 2b	...5 0 1 2 4	Sewell c	...0 0 0 0 0
Hopkins 3b	...5 0 0 2 3	Stone rf	...5 0 1 1 0
Shea c	...3 1 0 5 2	Harris lf	...2 1 1 1 0
Madjeski c	...0 0 0 0 0	Manush lf	...1 0 0 0 0
GASTON p	...3 0 0 2 2	Susko 1b	...4 0 2 12 0
GALLIVAN p	...0 0 0 0 1	BENSON p	...2 0 0 0 0
LYONS p	...0 0 0 1 0	McCOLL p	...0 0 0 0 0
aCenlan	...1 1 1 0 0	dPhillips	...1 0 0 0 0
bUhlir	...1 0 0 0 0		
cBoken	...0 1 0 0 0		

Totals ...39 9 12 27 17 Totals ...39 8 14 27 13
aBatted for Gaston in 8th.
bBatted for Shea in 9th.
cBatted for Gallivan in 9th.
dBatted for McColl in 9th.
Chicago .. 101 200 032-9
Washington300 101 210-8
Errors—Appling, Hopkins.
Runs batted in—Appling 2, Myer, Bolton 3, Hayes, Simmons 5, Susko, Harris, Haas, Stone. Two-base hits—Myer, Bolton. Stolen bases—Harris, Swanson. Sacrifices—Benson 2, Double plays—Appling, Hayes and Dykes; Shea and Hayes. Left on bases—Chicago 13, Washington 12. Bases on balls, off—Benson 5, Gaston 5, McColl 3, Gallivan 1. Struck out, by—Benson 4, Gaston 2, Gallivan 1. Hits, off—Gaston, 11 in 7; Lyons, 1 in 1; Gallivan, 2 in 1; Benson, 9 in 7-3; McColl, 3 in 1-3. Hit by pitcher, by—Benson (Swanson, Dykes). Wild pitches—Gaston 2. Winning pitcher—Gallivan. Losing pitcher—McColl. Umpires—Ormsby, Geisel. Time, 2:20.

