

Crash Davis, "Fact and Fiction"

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"I wasn't like Bob Feller or Joe DiMaggio. But I played against them."
"Crash" Davis, 1988

It is often said that fiction is larger than life, but in the case of dueling "Crash" Davises, the opposite holds true if measured only in terms of time spent in "The Show."

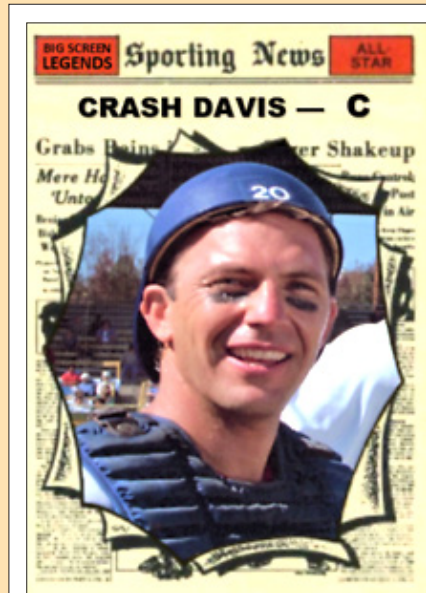
The fictional "Crash" featured in the 1988 hit movie "Bull Durham," talks about his 21 days in major leagues, while the real life "Crash" plays three complete seasons with the American League's Philadelphia Athletics between 1940-1942.

Despite setting the minor league home run record, it's not certain if the fictional switch-hitting catcher ever goes "Yard" in his brief major league tenure. On the other hand, Lawrence Columbus Davis, a right-handed hitting infielder from Gastonia, North Carolina, hits two home runs in his three seasons with Connie Mack and the Athletics.

However, Kevin Costner's Davis *does* ends up with Annie Savoy.



Crash Davis
1941 Philadelphia Athletics



Crash Davis
1988 Durham Bulls

ANATOMY OF A NICKNAME



"Young Crash Davis is making a big hit with his shrill rooting. Crash encourages his pals in a high tenor that causes everyone in the stand to try to imitate him. The North Carolina boy has lots of color."

--The Sporting News, September 19, 1940

Growing up, Davis' nickname is "Squeaky" a reflection of his high-pitched voice, and a moniker which continues throughout his playing career. Crash later says in an interview, "I don't think there would have been any place in the movie for "Squeaky" Davis. Not overly fond of his nickname, he changes it to a more masculine-sounding "Dynamite." However, during an American Legion game, Davis collides with the left fielder and as Davis explains, "The dynamite exploded and I've been Crash ever since."

A native of Canon, Georgia, Davis' family moves to North Carolina where he is the star shortstop on Doc Newton's 1935 Gastonia Post 23 American Legion National Championship team and for the 1936 Gastonia High School North Carolina State Championship team.

According to an article by Elton Casey in the August 5, 1948, edition of the *Durham Sun*, Davis was good enough to make the Legion team as a 10-year-old and played on the club for seven-straight years.

It was during his time with the Legion team that he acquires the nickname "Crash," thus enabling Bull Durham director Ron Shelton to select his name for the lead role. But nicknames didn't come easy for Davis.

Davis matriculates to Duke University where he is a three-year starter (1938-1940) on the baseball team, including being the team captain in 1940, and just for good measure, the class president in 1942. In the summer of 1937, following his freshman year with the Blue Devils, an 18-year-old Davis draws a paycheck for the first time when he elects to play with the local Gastonia Spinners in the highly-competitive, but outlawed Carolina League.

Gastonia Nine Winner Of National Tourney

Tar Heels Win 12-8 Over Sacramento For 3rd Straight Victory and Clinch On National Junior Legion Championship After Exciting Finale.

Gastonia, Aug. 31. —(AP)— The Gastonia junior baseball team was national champions today.

A 12-8 triumph yesterday afternoon over the Sacramento, Cal., team, western sectional champions, gave Gastonia her third consecutive victory in the "Little World Series," sponsored by the American Legion.

After the game, Gastonia was presented with national and state championship trophies, and Sacramento was given the Gaylord trophy representing the western sectional championship. Red Wakefield, Sacramento pitcher, received the "best sportsman" award, and second honors were conferred upon Crash Davis, Gastonia shortstop.

Sacramento Ties Count
It looked bad for Gastonia in the first half of the eighth inning yesterday when Sacramento brought in five runs to tie the score at eight all. But the North Carolinians displayed some balling prowess in the last of the eighth to run up the winning margin of four runs.

Shortstop Davis of Gastonia accounted for seven outs and one assist during the game. His teammate, left-fielder Hand, hit safely three times in four trips to the plate. For Sacramento, Dutra hit twice in three trips and Younglove twice, one a double, in four trips. "Sokie" Dellinger, southpaw, nulled the first seven innings for Gastonia. He was replaced by his brother, M. Dellinger.

Score by innings: R H E
Sacramento... 210 000 050 —8 8 4
Gastonia 013 100 34x—12 17 6

"Crash" Davis [2 of 5]:

Leaving Duke one semester shy of graduation (he will return and earn his degree in Graduation Exercises eight years later), Davis goes straight from campus to Shibe Park and the Philadelphia Athletics where on June 5, 1940, in front of 18,553 fans, he fouls out as a pinch hitter in his major league debut against Detroit's Schoolboy Rowe.

Davis will play in only 23 games for the Athletics in 1940, but will collect 18 hits in 67 at bats and finish with a career-best .259 batting average.

Crash Davis Will Supplant McCoy, A's \$65,000 Beauty

In 1941, spring training notes reveal that the Athletics are leaning to starting the "squeaky-voiced" Davis instead of high-salaried incumbent second baseman Benny McCoy. Davis does open the 1941 season as the team's starting second baseman and goes 3-for-4 in a 3-1 season opening win over the New York Yankees.

But when his average drops to .143 after the seventh game, McCoy reclaims the starting spot for the remainder of the season. Davis has only one at bat during the month of May.

Boston Red Sox at Philadelphia A's Shibe Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania May 30, 1942

BOSTON					PHILADELPHIA					
AB	R	H	P	A.	AB	R	H	P	A.	
DiMaggio	5	1	4	4	0	Krevich	4	1	1	0
Pesky	5	0	1	2	0	Suder	3	4	0	2
Fox	5	0	0	0	0	Siebert	1	4	0	0
Williams	4	1	1	2	0	Johnson	4	1	1	1
Cronin	1	3	1	2	6	1	Valo	3	1	1
Doerr	2	4	1	1	2	1	Wagner	4	0	1
Tabor	3	4	0	2	1	3	Davis	4	1	2
Conroy	4	0	0	1	0	0	Walasa	4	0	0
Terry	2	0	0	0	0	1	Wolf	3	1	1
xFinney	1	0	0	0	0	0				
Ryba	0	0	0	0	1					
xxLupien	1	0	0	0	0					
Totals 38					Totals 34					

x Batted for Terry in sixth.
xx Batted for Ryba in ninth.
Boston 100 002 010—4
Philadelphia 012 002 00x—5
Errors—Suder, Siebert, Pesky. Runs
batted in—Pesky, Williams, Doerr, Tabor,
Johnson, Suder 2, Davis 2. Two-base
hits—DiMaggio, Suder 2, Cronin. Home
runs—Johnson, Williams, Doerr, Davis.
Stolen base—Valo. Left on base—Phila-
delphia 8, Boston 8. Base on balls—
off Wolf 1, off Terry 1. Struck out—
by Wolf 9, by Terry 5. Hits—off Terry,
6 in 6 innings, off Ryba, 3 in 2 innings.
Passed ball—Wagner. Losing pitcher—
Terry. Umpires—Stewart, Quinn and
Basil. Time of game—1:52. Attendance
—17,166.

Davis hits his first major league home run (in his 68th career game) off Yank Terry in the sixth inning with one on, giving the Philadelphia Athletics a 5-4 victory over the Boston Red Sox in the second game of a double-header and snapping a seven-game losing streak by the last-place A's.

Crash Davis Year by Year:

Year	Team	League	Lev	AB	HT	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	AVG	
1937	Gastonia Spinners	Carolina	Ind.	270	72	9	5	5	46	2	.267	
1938	Duke University	Southern	College	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.383	
1938	Rutland Royals	Northern	SPro	82	21	4	1	0	9	-	.256	
1939	Duke University	Southern	College	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.356	
1939	Sanford Spinners	Central Carolina	SPro	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1939	Gastonia Cardinals	Tobacco State	D	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.386	
1940	Duke University	Southern	College	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.337	
1940	Philadelphia Athletics	AMERICAN	ML	67	18	1	1	0	9	1	.269	
1941	Philadelphia Athletics	AMERICAN	ML	105	23	3	0	0	8	0	.219	
1942	Philadelphia Athletics	AMERICAN	ML	272	61	8	1	2	26	1	.224	
1943	US Navy	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1944	US Navy	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1945	US Navy	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1946	Lawrence Millionaires	New England	B	440	131	23	2	19	94	1	.298	
1947	2 Teams	New England	B	420	128	23	9	8	79	5	.300	
	Lawrence/Lowell Orphans	New England	B									
	Pawtucket Slaters	New England	B									
1948	Durham Bulls	Carolina	C	540	171	50	3	10	80	4	.317	
1949	Raleigh Capitals	Carolina	B	453	134	34	3	7	60	3	.296	
1950	2 Teams	Carolina	B	497	130	29	2	4	46	3	.262	
	Raleigh Capitals	Carolina	B									
	Reidsville Luckies	Carolina	B									
1951	Raleigh Capitals	Carolina	B	480	124	28	5	2	66	4	.258	
1952	Raleigh Capitals	Carolina	B	416	96	15	4	1	41	1	.231	
Major League Totals				3 Seasons	444	102	12	2	2	43	2	.230
Minor League Totals				7 Seasons	3246	914	202	28	51	466	23	.281

ML Debut: June 5, 1940, at Shibe Park, Philadelphia: pinch hit for Albert Brancato in the ninth inning and is 0-for-1 against Schoolboy Rowe, fouling out to third baseman Pinky Higgins in a 9-1 loss to the Detroit Tigers.
ML Finale: September 20, 1942, at Shibe Park, Philadelphia: started at second base (batting 8th) and went 0-for-3 with a walk against Bill Suber in a 2-1 win in 10 innings over the Washington Senators.

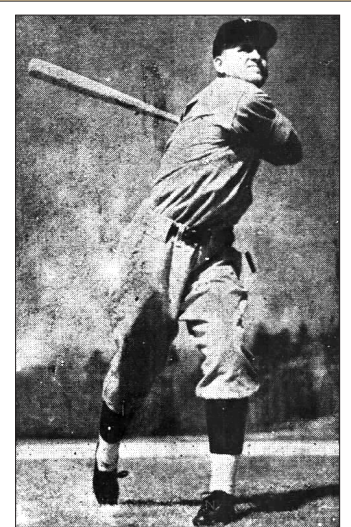
He will spend one more year with the Athletics (1942) before being drafted into the military. In his three years with Philadelphia, Davis earns \$9,400 in total salary, including a career-best \$4,000 in his final season.

Following his discharge from the Navy in 1946, Davis is expected to compete for a starting berth at second base for the Athletics, but is beaten out by a triumvirate of 27-year-old Irv Hall and a pair of 31-year-old veterans, Oscar Grimes and Gene Handley.

Told he has lost a step and released by the team, Connie Mack wants the North Carolinian to report to the Pacific Coast League's Portland Beavers. Davis declines Mack's offer and instead signs with the Lawrence Millionaires of the Class B New England League where he is reunited with his brother Hudson.

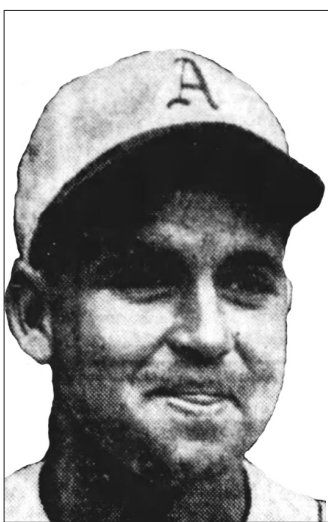
Showing some unexpected pop in his bat, he sets career-highs in both home runs (19) and RBIs (94) and was voted the team's Most Valuable Player. In addition he earns the first of five career All-Star honors (1946, 1947, 1948, 1951, 1952).

Davis will play two all-star seasons in the New England League before returning home to North Carolina in time for the 1948 season.



Crash Davis
1939 Duke Blue Devils

"Crash" Davis [3 of 5]:



Crash Davis
1941 Philadelphia Athletics

Over the final four years of his career, Davis toils in the Carolina League for the Durham Bulls, Raleigh Capitals and Reidsville Luckies, earning All-Star honors three times. In 1948 he sets league marks for most assists and double plays (132) by a second baseman. Davis earns one last Carolina League All-Star honor in his final season in 1952, despite a career-low .231 average in 96 games with the Raleigh Capitals.

Retiring after the 1952 season, Davis returns to Gastonia High School where he wins the state title in baseball in each of his first two seasons (1953, 1954) as a head coach. In 1954, he was also the coach of the Gastonia Post 23 American Legion team that won the state, regional and sectional championships and was runner-up in the American Legion Little World Series.

On June 13, 1956, Davis resigns his high school and legion coaching posts in Gastonia to accept a position in the personnel department with Burlington Industries.

After a year-long battle with cancer, Davis passes away on August 31, 2001, in Greensboro, North Carolina at the age of 82.

CRASH CHRONOLOGY

March 29, 1940

After missing Duke's first three games with a minor back ailment, Davis is 2-for-4 with a home run in an 8-1 win over visiting Colby College.



Crash Davis
1938 Rutland Royals

May 29, 1940

Davis signs with the Philadelphia Athletics.

June 2, 1940

Philadelphia reaches its 25-man team limit with the arrival of Davis.

June 5, 1940

Davis makes his major league debut against the Detroit Tigers ... pinch hitting in the ninth inning for Albert Brancato, he fouls out to third baseman Pinky Higgins in a 9-1 loss.

June 17, 1940

Davis has eye surgery to remove a cinder when the team arrives in Detroit and forced to miss a couple of weeks.

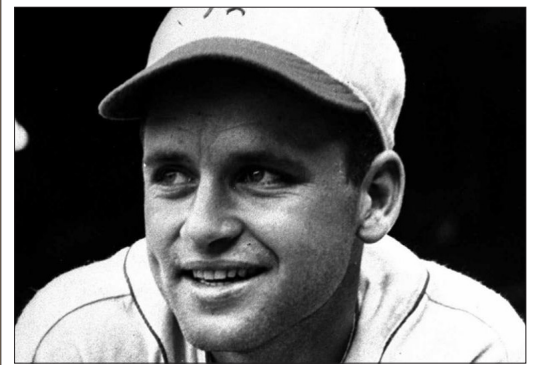
August 6-7-8-9, 1940

After going hitless in his first six career at bats, Davis is 8-for-17 over a four-game span and raises his batting average to .348 - a career-best figure ... Davis collects his first career hit (a triple) on

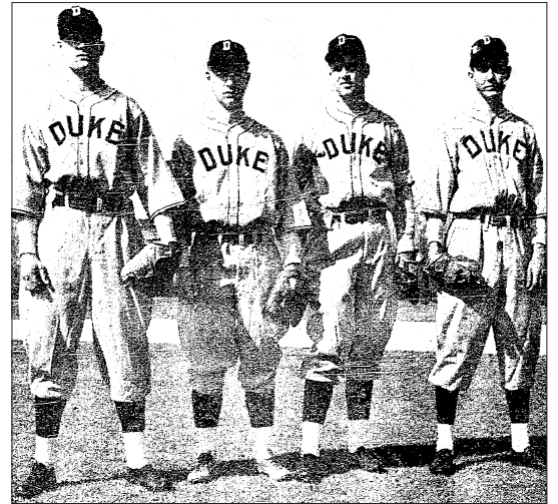
August 6, against the New York Yankees' Spud Chandler.

May 30, 1942

Davis hits his first major league home run (in his 68th career game) off Yank Terry in the sixth inning with one on, giving the Philadelphia Athletics a 5-4 victory over the Boston Red Sox.



Crash Davis
1942 Philadelphia Athletics



Duke's 1939 starting infield (l-r): 3B Glen Price, SS Russ Bergman, 2B Crash Davis and 1B Eddie Shokes



Crash Davis
1940 Duke University

"Crash" Davis [4 of 5]:

September 11, 1942

Davis hits his second career home run off of Detroit's Dizzy Trout in the third as the Athletics edge the homestanding Tigers 5-4 before 1,084 in Briggs Stadium.

September 20, 1942

In his final major league game, Davis starts at second base and is 0-for-3 with a walk against Bill Suber in a 2-1 win in 10 innings over the Washington Senators.

November 3, 1942

Davis and Wake Forest's Fred Hood are both sworn into Gene Tunney's naval physical fitness program.

March 30, 1946

Davis is one of six players released by the Philadelphia Athletics ... Connie Mack wants to send Davis to Portland, but Davis demurs and opts to sign with

the Lawrence Millionaires of the New England League where is reunited with his older brother Hudson



Lawrence "Crash" Davis & Hudson "Hut" Davis
1946 Lawrence Millionaires



Crash Davis
1948 Durham Bulls

January 5, 1948

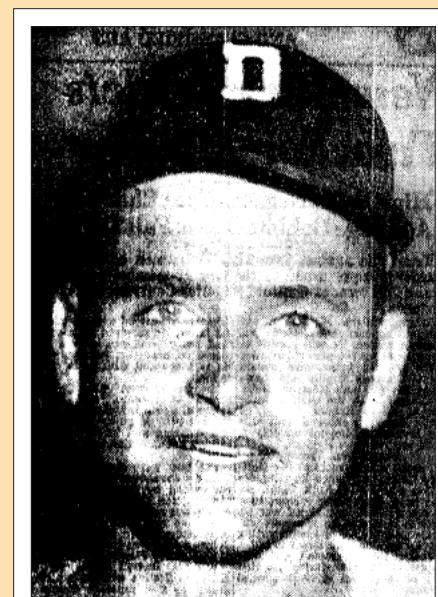
The semipro Rutland Royals announce that Crash Davis will not be their manager in the upcoming season ... team officials say that the former major leaguer made salary demands that club could not meet.

July 11, 1948

Davis hits two home runs, including a first inning grand slam off of Martinsville Mason Bowles, to lead an underdog East team to a 19-2 win over the West squad in the Carolina League All-Star game before 3,862 fans in Greensboro's Memorial Stadium.

February 4, 1948

Davis signs with the Durham Bulls.



Crash Davis
1948 Durham Bulls

June 6, 1948

Davis earns his degree from Duke University in Graduation Exercises.

July 17, 1948

Davis hits two home runs off Burlington's Maxie Wilson in an 11-3 loss to the Bees ... the 32-year-old ex-major leaguer from Haw River, North Carolina, Wilson will finish the season 13-3.

September 11, 1948

In voting by the Carolina League Baseball Writers Association, Davis and Reidsville Lefty Hester, are the only two unanimous selections to the league's all-star team ... Hester, a 26-year-old lefty, is named the league MVP after totaling a Carolina League record 25 wins for the seventh-place Luckies.

October 4, 1948

The Durham Bulls release Davis, their all-star second baseman.

April 10, 1950

Delayed a couple of weeks because of his teaching and coaching duties at Bethesda High School in Durham, Davis finally show up

"Crash" Davis [5 of 5]:



In 1948, Crash Davis will fall one double shy of tying the league record of 51 set two years earlier by Durham's Woody Fair (above). Davis hits his 50th two-bagger with 13 games left to play, but still falls one shy of the record.

Rockets of the Tri-State League ... however, Raleigh wants \$1,000 from Gastonia for his services ... the job eventually goes to 29-year-old Hal Van Pelt.

April 15, 1952

Davis is named as the second baseman on the mythical all-time Carolina League team as selected by *Durham Herald* sports editor Jack Horner.

May 1, 1952

After earlier deciding to forgo his playing career in lieu of a teaching job at Durham High School, Davis changes his mind and rejoins the Raleigh Capitals.

CRASH IN COBB

Davis had a cameo appearance in the 1994 movie "Cobb," in which he played baseball great Wahoo Sam Crawford. During a shoot, Davis sat at a table and waited for his cue, when he was to simply stand and wave.

On cue, Davis stood and waved, then waved some more as he continued standing then turned and waved to some more people.

"Cut!" director Ron Shelton finally said. Crash, you're not running for political office. Just stand and wave and sit down."

"Just trying to get as much camera time as I can, Ron," Davis said.

His camera time was short. His time with us was far too short.

Ed Hardin, *Greensboro News & Record*
September 3, 2001

in the Raleigh Capitals' camp and signs his contract ... Davis is unable to make any road trips with the team, except for Durham, until the schools close in late May

May 16, 1950

Off to a slow start, Raleigh President Rudy Knipe trades to Davis to the Reidsville Luckies for a "fly chaser."

June 21, 1950

Davis' fifth-inning home run gives the Reidsville Luckies a 6-5 win over first-place Winston-Salem and a sweep of the two-game series ... 19-year-old Cardinal third baseman and future Baltimore Orioles manager Earl Weaver is 1-for-3 with an RBI and ace right-hander Lee Peterson takes the loss, his second-straight after opening the season with 11 straight wins.

July 24, 1950

Davis sets a Carolina League single game record with 13 putouts in a 14-inning, 6-5 loss to the Burlington Bees.

February 1, 1952

Davis is interested in the managerial position with the Gastonia

Real 'Crash' Davis dies at 82

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — Lawrence "Crash" Davis, the minor league baseball player made famous by the movie "Bull Durham," died Friday after a yearlong battle with cancer. He was 82.

Davis was a baseball star and successful coach long before the 1988 movie about a longtime minor league catcher thrust his name back into the limelight.

Born in Canon, Ga., in 1919, Davis played shortstop on the Gastonia Post 23 American Legion team that won the national championship in 1935.

World War II interrupted his career, but he returned to professional baseball in 1946 and played in the minor leagues until 1951. He played for Raleigh, Durham and Reidsville in the Carolina League. In 1948, he had one of his best seasons, hitting .315 with a league-record 50 doubles for Durham.

The nickname "Crash" was given to him as a child, he once said, after crashing into another player while chasing down a flyball.

Years after Davis retired from baseball, filmmaker Ron Shelton saw his record listed in a Carolina League guide and had an epiphany:

The name "Crash Davis" would be perfect for a character in his movie.

"Back in my heyday, I got a lot of recognition," Davis said in a 1988 interview with *The Associated Press*. "But never, never in my wildest dreams. ..."

When Davis met the production company at a Durham motel, he was startled by the degree of his renewed celebrity.

"All these people jumped up when I said my name was Crash Davis," he said. "You would have thought I'd been resurrected."

The popular film, starring Kevin Costner, Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins, brought instant fame to the Durham Bulls baseball team and a renewed interest in minor league baseball. The movie's producer, Thom Mount, is a Durham native.

When Davis retired, he went back to Gastonia and coached high school baseball. He coached Bethesda High to state championships in 1953 and 1954. Davis also coached the 1954 Gastonia American Legion team to a runner-up finish in the national tournament.

Davis was inducted into the North Carolina American Legion Baseball Hall of Fame in 1979.

August 31, 2001

Davis passes away in Greensboro, North Carolina at the age of 82.