

Cups of Coffee: Bill Bonness

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**"That gets me around to this fellow Bonness - Bill Bonness wasn't it - that you had last year? I understand he would be a great pitcher if he were not so wild and had more confidence in himself."
- Stan Hack, Des Moines Boosters Manager, January 28, 1948**

September 26, 1944, Cleveland, Ohio
As Cleveland Indian rookie Bill Bonness makes his way in from the bullpen in relief of starter [Al Smith](#), temperatures in Cleveland's venerable League Park have dropped into the low 50's since the game's 8:30 pm first pitch.

While Bonness finishes his warm-up tosses to catcher [Buddy Rosar](#), some 3,950 miles away in the increasingly important Netherlands' town of Arnhem, what is left of the [British First Airborne Division](#) is completing a secretive and miraculous withdrawal over the Rhine in the face of overwhelming German forces. By the end of the game, the majority of surviving British forces, some 2,163 weary Airborne soldiers, are safely across the river.



**Bill Bonness
1945 Wilkes-Barre Barons**



**Bill Bonness
1944 Cleveland Indians**

Prior to his major league debut with his hometown Indians, [William John Bonness](#) is 3-10 with a 5.00 ERA in 35 appearances for the Eastern League's last-place Wilkes-Barre Barons. Hardly a ringing endorsement for the 6-foot-4, 180-pounder.

The Senators have already pushed across four runs against the 34-year-old Smith and [George Myatt](#) is sitting on first base with two outs when Bonness finally toes the rubber. His first major league pitch to Senator third baseman [Gil Torres](#) is ripped to left center for an RBI double. Following a wild pitch, the "slide slinging" lefty gets four-time All-Star [Stan Spence](#) to make the third and final out of the inning.

In all, Bonness allows two runs on five hits and two walks in 1 1/3 innings before being relieved by [Paul Calvert](#) in the fourth inning as the Senators score twice more en route to an 8-3 victory before an "estimated" crowd of 1,000. Three days later, Bonness makes his second and final major league appearance with a starting assignment against the Philadelphia Athletics. He closes out his major league career allowing four runs on six hits and three walks in 5 2/3 innings as [Connie Mack's](#) A's cruise to a 4-2 win.

In his two major league games, Bonness is 0-1 with a 7.71 ERA. In seven innings he allows six runs on 11 hits and five walks with one strikeout - that being Philadelphia second baseman [Irv Hall](#). His major league career now over at the age of 20, Bonness returns to the minors for three more seasons before calling it quits after the 1947 season at the advanced age of 23.

Born on December 15, 1923, to William and Hilda Bonness in Lakewood, Ohio, a town of 40,000 and a suburb of Cleveland on the southern shore of Lake Erie. He plays three sports at [Lakewood High School](#) and is a two-year starter at center on a basketball team that is runners-up to Martins Ferry High School for the Ohio Class A championship in 1941. He runs the hurdles in track, and according to several newspaper articles, he plays only one year of baseball at the school, primarily as a first baseman. During the summer after his junior season, he practices several times with the Indians.

An early January high school graduate, Bonness quickly signs with the Indians on January 6, 1942. Pitching into a newspaper-sponsored speed meter, Bonness twice records rates of "121 feet per second" or 82.5 miles per hour (something doesn't seem right for a pro pitcher). He is assigned to Wisconsin State League's Appleton Papermakers and is the team's opening-day starter.

Tribe Signs High School Pitcher

CLEVELAND, January 6—When the Cleveland Indians baseball club goes south on their spring training trip in February a big six-foot four-inch pitcher, who will be graduated from high school only this month, will don feathers and join the Indians' procession to the training camp.

The Tribe's new find is Bill Bonness, 18-year-old Lakewood high school athlete. Pitching into a speed meter recently, Bonness twice recorded rates of 121 feet per second, which is right up there with the marks of many of the "faster" major league pitchers.

Bonness hurled in a Lakewood class A league last season and is an ace performer in basketball.

Bill Bonness Year by Year:

Year	Team	League	Level	W-L	Finish	W-L	GP	GS	CG	SHO	INN	H	ER	BB	SO	ERA
1942	3 Teams	3 Leagues	C/D			5-8	22	-	-	-	93	78	30	97	-	--
	Appleton Pappermakers	Wisconsin State	D	49-54	4 of 8	3-4	10	7	1	0	39	36	30	38	29	6.92
	Charleston Senators	Middle Atlantic	C	75-51	1 of 6	0-0	1	0	0	0	3	-	-	-	-	--
	Logan Indians	Mountain State	D	40-79	6 of 6	3-4	11	-	-	-	51	42	-	62	-	--
1943	Post Products	Lakewood Class A	SPro	--	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--
1943	Military Service	--	--	--	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--
1944	Wilkes-Barre Barons	Eastern	A	51-89	8 of 8	3-10	35	19	6	2	144	139	80	127	88	5.00
1944	Cleveland Indians	AMERICAN	ML	77-82	5 of 8	0-1	2	1	0	0	7	11	6	5	1	7.71
1945	Wilkes-Barre Barons	Eastern	A	78-59	2 of 8	5-11	23	16	7	0	115.1	100	58	85	81	4.54
1946	Harrisburg Senators	Interstate	B	76-64	2 of 8	0-1	1	1	0	0	2.1	1	2	4	2	7.72
1947	Des Moines Bruins	Western	A	75-52	2 of 6	4-6	18	-	4	3	83	61	28	62	77	3.04
Major League Totals						1 Season										
Minor League Totals						5 Seasons										
						17-36	99	*36	*17	*5	437.2	379	*198	375	*148	--

*denotes incomplete statistic

ML Debut: September 26, 1944 at League Park, Cleveland: relief pitcher for Cleveland in a 8-3 loss to the Washington Senators; allowed two runs (all earned) in 1 1/3 innings on 5 hits and 2 walks (no decision).

ML Finale: September 29, 1944 at League Park, Cleveland: starting pitcher for Cleveland in a 4-2 loss to the Philadelphia Athletics; allowed four runs (all earned) in 5 2/3 innings on 6 hits, 3 walks and 1 strikeout (losing pitcher; 0-1).

Transactions:

- January 6, 1942 Bonness signs with the Cleveland Indians.
- March, 1943 Drafted by the United States Army
- January, 1944 Discharged by the United States Army
- February 15, 1944 Assigned by the Cleveland Indians to the Wilkes-Barre Barons of the Eastern (A) League.
- September 10, 1944 Purchased by the Cleveland Indians to exempt him from the minor league draft.
- April 3, 1945 Optioned by the Cleveland Indians to the Wilkes-Barre Barons of the Eastern (A) League.
- February 1, 1946 Contract is sold by the Cleveland Indians to the Wilkes-Barre Barons
- May 15, 1946 Assigned by the Wilkes-Barre Barons to the Harrisburg Senators of the Interstate (B) League.
- June 3, 1946 Released by the Harrisburg Senators.
- March 12, 1947 Signed by the Des Moines Bruins of the Western (A) League.
- August 4, 1947 Released by the Des Moines Bruins
- August 5, 1947 Signed by the Davenport (Iowa) Cubs of the Three-I (B) League
- April 12, 1948 Assigned by the Chicago Cubs to the Selma (Ala.) Cloverleaves of Southeastern (B) League.
- May 3, 1948 Selma Cloverleaves general manager Tom Johnson announces Bonness' release.

Bonness is 3-4 in six starts for the Papermakers when he is put on the suspended list on June 14, because of a protracted illness. Three weeks later, with his health still "below par", Bonness goes on the voluntary retired list and he returns home to rest and put

on some much-needed weight. He returns in July for one game with the Charleston (W. Va.) Senators, before moving to the Logan Indians where he averages 13.8 strikeouts per game over a month and a half period while compiling a 3-4 mark for the last-place Tribe.

Before the start of the 1943 season he is drafted into the army and assigned to [Fort Sill](#) in Oklahoma, where he serves 10 months before receiving a discharge after breaking his leg in a football game.

Back with Cleveland in 1944, he is assigned to the Wilkes-Barre Barons of the Eastern (A) League. His control problems persist as he walks 127 in 144 innings en route to a 3-10 record with six complete games and two shutouts. Nevertheless, at the end of the Eastern League season, his contract is purchased by Cleveland and in September he makes his major league debut.



Bill Bonness
1944 Cleveland Indians



Bill Bonness
1945 Baldwin Wallace College

B.-W. Cagers Open Practice Monday

With Case already practicing, Baldwin-Wallace will start basketball drills next Monday. Coach Ray Watter announced yesterday. The Yellow Jackets' schedule is not yet completed, but they expect to play 18 games, including trips to Boston and Rochester.

Case will open its season at Rochester on Dec. 3 and expects to play approximately 15 games.

B.-W. has a flock of new talent, including Hank Ruzkowski and Bill Bonness, who joined the Cleveland Indians for the last few games of the season, the former as a catcher and the latter as a pitcher. Other newcomers include Jack Mason, New Philadelphia, and John Buckley, Akron.

Bill Bonness [3 of 5]:

In the meantime, he enrolls at [Baldwin Wallace College](#) in Berea, Ohio, where he and Cleveland teammate [Hank Ruzzkowski](#) earn roster spots on the school's basketball team. His wife works at the college and now free of his military obligations, he decides to major in biological science while on the GI Bill. He also expresses a desire to attain a master's in public health.

In 1945, he reports to the Indians' spring training and is one of 12 pitchers on the roster, including nine 4-Fs. He is assigned for a second-straight year to Wilkes-Barre where they attempt to change his delivery from sidearm to overhand. Despite winning his first four starts of the season, he finishes 5-11 with 85 walks in 115 1/3 innings and a 4.54 ERA.

In 1946, the Indians tell him to report to Wilkes-Barre for a third-straight year, but he is stricken by an attack of chicken pox and unable to join the team. Following a single game, a three-inning outing on May 30, with the Harrisburg Senators, Cleveland elects to release him to the Barons. Deciding to return home, he plays semipro ball in the Cleveland area before signing that winter with the Chicago Cubs.



Bill Bonness
1947 Des Moines Cubs

In 1947, He reports to the Des Moines Bruins, 25 pounds under his usual weight and with saddled with his annual sore arm.

In his Bruins' debut, Bonness pitches what could be the best game of his career, shutting out the Denver Grizzlies 3-0, on five hits. In 18 games for [Jim Keesey's](#) Bruins he is 3-4 with a 3.04 ERA. He ties for the Western League lead with three shutouts despite having only four complete games on the year. But his control problems persist and on July 29, in what turns out to be his final professional appearance, Bonness is relieved in the first inning by [Bob Kuhlman](#) after throwing 12 pitches, 11 of them balls.

The "big fellow" decides to give it one final shot with Des Moines the following spring. However, in what has become a recurring theme, he is unable to throw off the mound once arriving in camp. The Bruins believe a basketball injury suffered in the off-season is responsible, while Bonness claims he injured his arm on his very first pitch of camp.

When the Bruins depart from their training camp in Selma, Alabama, the sore-armed twirler is left behind having been assigned by the Cubs to the Selma Cloverleaves of Southeastern (B) League. Three weeks later, on May 3, Cloverleaf general manager Tom Johnson announces the Ohioan's release.

Bonness's baseball career is over at the ripe old age of 24.

Returning home, he takes a job as a credit manager of a Sears & Roebuck store in Elyria, a suburb of Cleveland. Bonness remains active playing baseball with the Wenham Truckers, a local semipro team of note. In 1953, he is voted the outstanding player in city's fastest semipro league. He strikes out 19 in the Truckers' championship game victory.

Major League Debut

September 26, 1944

Washington Senators at Cleveland Indians
League Park, Cleveland, Ohio

WASHINGTON (8)						CLEVELAND (3)					
	ab	r	h	o	a		ab	r	h	o	a
Case,lf	6	0	1	1	0	Hoag,cf	4	0	0	3	0
Myatt,ss	5	3	3	2	4	Rocco,1b	3	1	1	8	1
Torres,3b	6	3	4	0	1	Culf'bine,rf	4	0	1	0	0
Spence,cf	4	1	1	3	0	Heath,lf	4	0	0	3	0
Vaughn,2b	5	0	1	4	4	Boudr'u,ss	4	1	2	2	2
Powell,rf	4	0	1	2	0	Keltner,3b	2	0	0	1	1
Butka,1b	5	0	2	1	0	Peters,3b	2	1	1	0	0
Ferrell,c	3	1	2	2	0	Rosar,c	4	0	1	6	0
Leonard,p	3	0	0	0	3	Macg,2b	2	0	1	2	3
						Biras,2b	1	0	1	1	1
						Ruzzk'ski	1	0	0	0	0
						Henry	0	0	0	0	0
						Smith,p	0	0	0	0	1
						Bonness,p	1	0	0	0	0
						Calvert,p	0	0	0	1	0
						Hockett	1	0	0	0	0
						Poat,p	0	0	0	0	1
						O'Dea	1	0	0	0	0
						Heving,p	0	0	0	0	1
						zSeerey	1	0	0	0	0

Totals 41 8 15 27 12 | Totals 35 3 8 27 11

*Batted for Calvert in 5th.
 †Batted for Poat in 7th.
 ‡Batted for Biras in 9th.
 §Ran for Ruzzkowski in 9th.
 zBatted for Heving in 9th.

Washington 3 2 0 2 0 0 0 1 0-8
 Cleveland 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 1 0-3

Errors—Vaughn, Biras, Myatt. Runs batted in—Spence 3, Myatt, Torres, Vaughn 2, Biras 2, Rocco, Powell. Two base hits—Myatt, Torres. Home runs—Spence, Rocco. Stolen bases—Vaughn, Powell. Sacrifices—Leonard, Powell. Double plays—Myatt, Vaughn and Butka; Leonard, Myatt and Butka. Left on bases—Washington 14; Cleveland 6. Bases on balls—Off Leonard 1; Bonness 2; Calvert 1; Heving 2. Strikeouts—By Leonard 1; Calvert 1; Poat 1; Heving 2. Hits—Off Smith, 6 in 1 2-3 innings; Bonness, 5 in 1 1-3; Calvert, 1 in 2; Poat, 1 in 2; Heving, 2 in 2. Wild pitches—Bonness, Leonard. Losing pitcher—Smith. Umpires—Weaver and Berry. Time—1:56. Attendance 1,000

Bonness is one of three Cleveland rookies to make their major league debuts in the Indians' 8-3 loss to the visiting Washington Senators. The other rookies are Hank Ruzzkowski, who appears as a pinch-hitter in the ninth and Earl Henry, who pinch runs for Ruzzkowski. In relief of starter Al Smith, Bonness allows two runs on five hits and two walks in 1 1/3 innings.

Bill Bonness [4 of 5]:

On December 3, 1977, Bonness passes away at the age of 53, at [St. John's Hospital](#) in Cleveland as a result from a fall he suffered at his home on Thanksgiving. Falling while carrying a box of tools down his basement steps, he is taken to St. John's where he undergoes brain surgery. At the time of his death he was a field inspector for the Cuyahoga County Engineers Office.

Bonness Chronology

January 6, 1942

Recently graduated from Lakewood High School, Bonness signs with the Cleveland Indians and will join the team at their spring training camp ... pitching into a speed meter, the 6-foot-4 lefty twice records rates of "121 feet per second" or 82.5 miles per hour.

May 16, 1942

Bonness is the Appleton Papermakers' opening day starter against Wisconsin Rapids ... he pitches a six-hit complete game in a 4-3 loss.

June 14, 1942

Bonness is 3-3 in six starts when he is put on the suspended list because of illness.

July 7, 1942

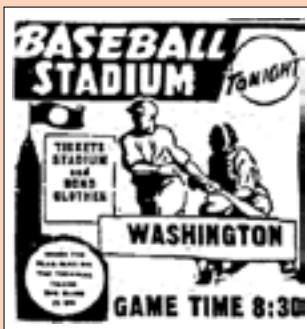
With his health "below par", Bonness goes on the voluntary retired list and returns to his home to rest and put on some weight ... he is 3-4 with a 8.54 ERA in 10 games with Appleton.

May 6, 1944

Back on the mound in a minor league game for the first time in nearly two years, Bonness pitches six strong innings, allowing only one run on five hits as Wilkes-Barre tops Scranton 6-1.

July 6, 1944

After starting the season 0-5, Bonness turns in his first career shutout, an 8-hit whitewashing of Scranton.



September 26, 1944

Two weeks after having his contract purchased by Cleveland, Bonness is one of three Indian rookies to make their major league debuts in an 8-3 loss to the visiting Washington Senators ... the other rookies are [Hank Ruzkowski](#), who appears as a pinch-hitter in the ninth and [Earl Henry](#), who pinch runs for Ruzkowski ... in relief of starter Al Smith, Bonness allows two runs on five hits and two walks in 1 1/3 innings.

September 29, 1944

In his second and final major league appearance, Bonness makes his first career start against the visiting Philadelphia Athletics ... in 5 2/3 innings, he allows four runs on six hits and a walk and takes the loss in a 4-2 setback ... Bonness strikes out A's lead off hitter [Irv Hall](#) to start the game ... it will be the only strikeout of his two-game major league career.

November 1944

Bonness set an Eastern League single season record with 17 wild pitches, a record he will hold until 1960.

May 30, 1946

In his only appearance for the Harrisburg Senators, he lasts only 2 1/3 innings, allowing two earned runs in a 10-6 loss to York.

Pro Baseball Debut

May 16, 1942

Wisconsin Rapids White Sox at Appleton Papermakers Goodland Field, Appleton, Wisconsin

Wisconsin Rapids—4

	AB	R	H	PO	A
Simcich.3b	3	0	1	0	0
McCarthy.1b	3	1	0	2	1
Shields.rf	3	0	2	1	0
Standaert.cf	2	0	0	4	0
Cominsky.c	4	1	1	9	2
Priebe.ss	4	1	1	3	2
Jeske.lf	1	1	0	0	0
Fouts.2b	3	0	1	0	3
Pouldniak.2b	0	0	0	0	4
Morel.p	2	0	0	1	3
†Ziemser	1	0	0	0	0

Totals 26 4 6 27 11

†Struck out for Fouts in eighth.

Appleton—3

	AB	R	H	PO	A
Munshower.cf	3	1	1	0	1
†Opolack	1	0	1	0	0
Turner.ss	3	0	0	3	1
Manarik.2b	4	0	1	3	3
Filippo.lf	4	0	0	1	0
Pardon.3b	4	1	1	2	1
Adams.1b	3	0	0	9	0
Misch.rf	4	1	2	1	0
Squier.c	4	0	1	5	2
Boness.p	3	0	0	0	4
Kowalski	1	0	0	0	0

Totals 34 3 7 24 12

†Singled for Munshower in ninth.

Safe on error for Boness in ninth.

Appleton 100 000 101—3
Wisconsin Rapids 100 001 02x—4

Errors—Simcich 2, Morel, Manarik, Misch. Runs batted in—Manarik, Misch, Kowalski, Fouts. Two base hits—Misch, Manarik, Pardon, Shields. Stolen bases—Jeske 2, Simcich, Cominsky. Sacrifices—Turner, Jeske. Double plays—Turner to Manarik to Adams. Left on bases—Appleton 8. Wisconsin Rapids 9. Bases on balls—off Boness 10, off Morell 2. Strikes out—Bonness 7, Morell 7. Balk—Bonness 2. Umpires—Aimil (plate) Zastava (Bases). Time 2:10.

Eighteen-year-old Bill Bonness, four months from his high school graduation, strikes out seven and allows only six hits, but walks 10 and balks home two runs in a 4-3 loss to Wisconsin Rapids in the season opener for both teams.

Bill Bonness [5 of 5]:

June 3, 1946

Bonness is released by Harrisburg.

**"Heretofore I've been sort of loopy and maybe lazy like so many big fellows.
But this year I want to hustle and run. I just feel like it."**

-Bill Bonness, April 10, 1947

May 5, 1947

In his Des Moines debut, Bonness shuts out Denver 3-0 on five hits ... he strikes out out seven, walks seven and hits one batter as Denver leaves 13 runners on base ... the following day, the local paper opines: "The Grizzlies were about as much menace to Bonness as a chicken is to a fox."

July 29, 1947

In his final career game, Bonness starts against Denver, and is relieved in the first inning by Bob Kuhlman after throwing 12 pitches, 11 of them balls.

1947

Bonness wins only four games with the Des Moines Bruins, but ties for the Western League lead in shutouts with three.

April 5, 1948

Bonness, is unable to throw since his belated arrival at the Des Moines Booster training camp ... the team believes a basketball injury suffered in the off-season is responsible, while Bonness claims he injured his throwing arm in his very first pitch of camp.

**Bonness, Lammers
Left at Selma**

April 12, 1948

Assigned by the Chicago Cubs to the Selma (Ala.) Cloverleaves of Southeastern (B) League.

May 3, 1948

Selma (Ala.) Cloverleaf general manager Tom Johnson announces the release of pitcher Bill Bonness.

1951

Bonness is pitching for the Wenham Truckers of Cleveland.

1953

Bonness is voted the outstanding player in Cleveland's fastest semipro league ... he strikes out 19 in pitching the Wenham Truckers to the championship game victory ... Bonness is a credit manager of a Sears & Roebuck store in Elyria, a suburb of Cleveland.

December 3, 1977

Bonness passes away in Cleveland at the age of 53.

Five-Hit Shutout

May 5, 1947

Des Moines Bruins at Denver Grizzlies
Merchants Park, Denver, Colorado

DENVER	AB.	R.	H.	2B.	3B.	HR.	P.O.	A.	E.
Dunn,ss	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	0
Clow,2b	5	0	2	0	0	0	6	5	0
Crawford,1b	3	0	1	0	0	0	6	2	1
Cherry,rf	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Badgett,3b	4	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Pfeffer,lf	4	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0
Burgess,cf	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Paulson,c	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
Johnson,p	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
aTrpo	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Opperman,p	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
bLauthen	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Revels,p	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	32	0	5	0	0	0	27	11	1

DES MOINES	AB.	R.	H.	2B.	3B.	HR.	P.O.	A.	E.
Raso,2b	4	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Mauro,cf	3	1	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Borkowski,lf	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Peden,1b	3	0	1	0	0	0	7	0	0
Aberson,rf	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Zelasko,3b	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	0
Smalley,ss	4	1	1	0	0	0	3	2	1
Fortune,c	4	0	2	0	0	0	7	1	0
Bonness,p	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	31	3	7	0	0	0	27	8	1

aGrounded into force out for Johnson in sixth.

bGrounded out for Opperman in eighth.

Score by innings:

Des Moines 000 021 000—3
Denver 000 000 000—0

Summary—Runs batted in, Smalley, Fortune; sacrifice hits, Zelasko, Borkowski; left on bases, Des Moines 9, Denver 13; double play, Clowe to Crawford.

Bases on balls, Bonness 7, Johnson 2, Revels 3; strikeouts, Bonness 7, Johnson 3, Opperman 1; runs and hits, off Johnson 3 and 5 in 6 innings, Opperman 0 and 2 in 2, Revels 0 and 0 in 1; earned runs, off Johnson 2; wild pitch, Revels; passed ball, Fortune; hit by pitched ball, by Bonness (Crawford), by Johnson (Peden); losing pitcher, Johnson.

Umpires, Stephens, Ericson and Gardner. Time, 2:03. Attendance, 4,351 (paid).

In his Des Moines' debut, a "bulky" Bill Bonness allows five hits, seven walks and strands 13 Denver runners for a 3-0 shutout victory. Only two runners advance as far as third.