

Walter Johnson, Jr., "Little Big Train"

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In the case of Walter Perry Johnson, Jr., the apple did fall far from the tree.

On May 15, 1936, the 20-year-old the son of Washington Senators Hall of Fame pitcher Walter Johnson, strikes out four of the first six batters he faces in his professional baseball debut with the Des Moines Demons of the Western (A) League.

On the afternoon, Johnson allows four runs on four hits with six strikeouts and six base on balls in 5 and 2/3 innings in a 10-2 loss to the visiting Waterloo Hawks.

Walter Jr., and his father will combine for 420 career wins in their respective professional baseball careers, with junior accounting for three, including two in 1937 with the Gastonia (N.C.) Spinners of "outlaw" Carolina League.

Because of his name and bloodline, the Bethesda, Md., native begins his professional baseball career at the major league level when he is invited by Philadelphia Athletics' owner/manager Connie Mack to join the team during its spring training in Fort Myers, Florida. Three weeks after allowing only one single in two innings during an intrasquad scrimmage, Mack announces that Johnson will be "dropped off" from the team's train back at hometown of Washington, D.C.



Walter Johnson, Jr.
1936 Philadelphia Athletics
Spring Training

Young Walt Makes Debut

Johnson Losing Hurler as Waterloo Rout Des Moines, 10 to 2

Des Moines, Ia., May 15 (AP).—Walter Johnson, jr., made his professional baseball debut with Des Moines Friday night, but had to leave in the sixth with the score 4 to 0 against him, and Waterloo went on to win, 10 to 2.

The 20-year-old rookie pitcher struck out four of the first six men to face him.

Waterloo		Des Moines	
ab.	r.	h.	o.
Cosbey ss	4	2	2
William 2b	5	0	2
Vusch rf	4	2	1
Shiell 1b	4	2	2
Plum'er cf	5	0	1
Mich'ls lf	4	0	2
DeCuir 3b	3	1	1
Richards c	3	2	5
Corpe p	2	1	0
Totals	34	10	27

Waterloo		Des Moines	
ab.	r.	h.	o.
Falk ss	5	0	0
Catch'gs 2b	4	0	0
Tierney 1b	3	0	1
Keyes lf	4	1	2
James cf	3	0	1
Menke rf	4	1	0
Piet 3b	3	0	1
Wilson c	3	0	1
Johnson p	2	0	0
Ludwick p	2	0	0
Totals	33	2	6

Errors—Cosbey, Menke. Home runs—Shiell, Piet. Sacrifice hits—Corpe. Struck out—Johnson 6, Ludwick 1, Corpe 5. Bases on balls—Johnson 6, Ludwick 1, Corpe 4. Hits—Johnson, 4 in 5 2-3; Ludwick, 6 in 3 1-3. Losing pitcher—Johnson. Double play—Piet-Catchings-Falk. Umpires—Collins and Cady. Time—2:12.

Two-Year-Old
Walter Johnson, Jr.



Six-Year-Old
Walter Johnson, Jr.



Eight-Year-Old
Walter Johnson, Jr.



WALTER JOHNSON, JR., son of famous Washington pitcher, warms up in "bull pen," in imitation of his father. He is star on Washington Kid Team.

Those three weeks in the Spring of 1936 will be the nearest that "Little Big Train" will get to the major leagues.

Born on July 2, 1915, Johnson almost has his playing career ended before it begins when both of his legs are broken after being struck by an automobile in the Spring of 1930. As a result of persistent control problems, the strapping 6'3" right-hander's professional baseball career will be short (2 years) and with limited success (2-5 with five different teams).

A World War II veteran with the Army Air Corps, a 45-year-old Johnson, suffering from Hodgkin's Disease, dies on March 29, 1951 at George Washington Hospital in the District of Columbia.

Walter Johnson [2 of 4]:

JOHNSON CHRONOLOGY

June 28, 1915

Washington Senator pitcher Walter "Big Train" Johnson shuts out the Philadelphia Athletics 2-0 on six hits for one of his major league-leading 110 career shutouts.

July 2, 1915

Walter Johnson, Jr., is born in Washington, D.C.

March 13, 1930

Johnson has both legs broken after being hit by an automobile while roller skating in front of his home.

March 27, 1930

The surgeons that reset Johnson's legs express concern that one leg's compound fracture is failing to mend properly and that amputation might be necessary.

July 6, 1930

Johnson returns to the playing field and pitches two hitless innings for the Bethesda (Md.) Juniors. The 15-year-old hurler starts the game for the "sandlotters" but retires after two innings because his father, who is in attendance, does not want to risk an injury to his legs by going to bat and possibly having to run the bases.

December 24, 1933

Starting at forward, Johnson scores two points as Bethesda (Md.) High School edges the Maryland State School for the Deaf 21-19 in a "rough and tumble" high school basketball game. Three field goals by the "Silenteers" are disallowed in the game's final quarter because of too many steps.

June 1, 1934

Walter Johnson's secret marriage to his high school sweetheart three weeks earlier is revealed. The 18-year-old Johnson marries 17-year-old Jean Duvall at Ellicott City, Md., back on May 12.

February 21, 1936 ▶▶

Connie Mack, owner/manager of the American's League's Philadelphia Athletics, invites Johnson to the team's spring training camp in Fort Myers, Florida.

"I am very happy over this opportunity and I'm going to give Connie Mack everything I've got. But I know I'll never be as good as dad. They don't come that good very often. Father's record certainly gives me something to shoot at but it's beyond my fondest dreams ever to even approach the heights he reached."
- Walter Johnson, Jr.

March 4, 1936

Johnson makes his debut with the Athletics in an intrasquad contest, allowing a lone single in two innings.

March 17, 1936

After two weeks of spring training with the Athletics, it's reported that Johnson, Jr., "does not know how to stand on the mound and none of his Athletics' bosses seem to bother about tipping off the rookie to such details."

Walter Johnson, Jr., Year by Year:

Year	Team	League	Level	W-L	INN	BB	ERA
1936	Des Moines Demons	Western	A	0-2	22	17	4.09
1936	Harrisonburg	Augusta	Ind.	0-0	7	4	--
1937	2 Teams	2 Leagues	B-D	1-2	-	-	--
	Durham Bulls	Piedmont	B	0-1	8	-	--
	Deland Reds	Florida State	D	1-1	-	-	--
1937	Gastonia Spinners	Carolina	Ind.	2-1	-	-	--
1937	Clinchco	Lonesome Pine	Ind.	-	-	-	--
1939	Bona-Allen Shoemakers	Semi-Pro	-	-	-	-	--
Minor League Totals		2 Seasons		1-4	37	21	--

'Little Big Train' Has Steam Up



Walter Johnson [3 of 4]:

March 24, 1936

Connie Mack announces that Johnson, Jr., will be "dropped off" the team's train in Washington, D.C., on its way north from the team's training camp in Fort Myers, Florida. In addition to Johnson, Les Butcher, another pitcher will also be "dropped off" in the nation's capital.

May 4, 1936

In an ironic twist of fate, Spencer Abbott, manager of the Des Moines Demons of the Western (A) League, signs Johnson, Jr., to a contract some 30 years after, as the manager of the Topeka Saints, he refuses to sign another young hurler who at that time is "burning up the sandlots of Idaho." That young hurler that Abbott declined to sign was Walter Johnson.

**"I refused to sign the youngster's dad 30 years ago, but believe me I'm not taking any chances on letting the boy get away."
- Spencer Abbott**

May 14, 1936

Johnson makes his professional baseball debut in a 10-2 loss to the visiting Waterloo Hawks. Johnson strikes out four of the first six hitters he faces. In the third inning, Johnson walks three batters before Hawks' shortstop Hal Cosbey hits a grand slam over the left field fence.

CAN HE PITCH LIKE DAD?



May 27, 1936

Johnson starts his second game of the season against Omaha Robin Hoods' veteran mound artist Clarence Mitchell. Johnson allows three runs on seven hits before leaving for a pinch hitter in the seventh inning in a 4-2 loss. The 45-year-old Mitchell pitches a complete game, allowing only seven hits.

June 23, 1936

Johnson's tenure in the Western League is cut short when

he is released by Des Moines' manager Spencer Abbott. Johnson is 0-2 with a 4.09 ERA in 22 innings pitched. The Demons sign pitcher Norwood Corpe to replace Johnson on the roster.

July 8, 1936 ▶▶

Harrisonburg rallies for three runs in the bottom of the eighth inning to defeat Staunton 5-4 in an Augusta League game. Staunton's Billy Robertson holds Harrisonburg hitless for the first five innings. Walter Johnson, Jr., makes his first start for Harrisonburg, allowing nine hits in seven innings before being lifted for a pinch hitter in the seventh inning. Lefty Eddins pitches two scoreless innings and receives credit for the win.

STAUNTON BEATEN IN THRILLER, 5-4

Walter Johnson, jr., Fails to Finish in First Start Here
—Flashy Fielding

Harrisonburg 5 Staunton 4

Harrisonburg, Virginia, July 8, 1936

Staunton	AB	R	H	O	A	E
Bibb, ss.....	5	1	1	2	1	1
Shaver, 2b.....	4	1	2	0	2	0
Harris, cf.....	5	2	4	1	0	0
Wills, c.....	5	0	3	8	1	1
Creath, 3b.....	4	0	0	0	0	0
Will, 1b.....	3	0	0	10	0	0
Bryan, rf.....	4	0	0	1	1	0
Shull, lf.....	3	0	0	1	0	0
Robertson, p.....	4	0	0	0	1	0
R. Long, p.....	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals.....	37	4	10	24	11	2

Harrisonburg	AB	R	H	O	A	E
Baker, ss.....	3	0	1	1	2	0
B. Huffman, rf.....	3	0	0	0	0	0
Ignasiak 1b.....	4	3	2	10	0	0
Lowery, 3b.....	4	2	2	4	1	1
S. Huffman, cf.....	4	1	0	2	0	0
Warren, c.....	2	0	0	3	2	1
Garland, lf.....	4	0	2	3	0	0
Rapp, 2b.....	4	0	1	4	3	0
Johnson, p.....	2	0	0	0	3	1
1-McKee, ph.....	1	0	0	0	0	0
Eddins, p.....	1	0	0	0	0	0
Totals.....	33	5	8	27	11	3

1-pinch hit for Johnson in 7th inning

Staunton.....	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	=	4
Harrisonburg...	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	x	=	5

Runs batted in: Wills 4, Garland 2, S. Huffman, Warren, Rapp. **Two base hit:** Wills. **Stolen base:** Harris 2, Will, Baker. **LOB:** Harrisonburg 5, Staunton 10. **Base on balls:** Robertson 3; Johnson 2; Eddins 2. **Struck out:** Robertson 7; Johnson 3; B. Long 1. **HBP:** By Johnson (Bryan); Robertson (B. Huffman). **Hits:** off Johnson 9 in 7 innings; Robertson 7 in 7 1-3 innings; Long 1 in 2-3 innings; Eddins 2 in 1 inning. **Winning pitcher:** Eddins. **Losing pitcher:** Robertson. Umpires: Settle, Byerly. Time: 1:30

Walter Johnson [4 of 4]:

June 1937

Signed by the Cincinnati Reds in the off-season, Johnson goes 0-1 with the Durham Bulls of the Piedmont (B) League.

June 10, 1937

Johnson is transferred from Durham to the DeLand Reds of the Florida State (D) League.

Young Walt Johnson Released by Deland for Wild Pitching

Deland, Fla., July 3 (U. P.).— "Wildness" on the mound was responsible for the unconditional release of Walter Johnson, Jr., by the Deland Reds, a class D baseball farm club of the Cincinnati Reds.

Johnson, seeking to follow the sensational standards set by his father, the famous "Big Train" of the Washington Senators, had won one game, lost one and been relieved several times when wildness got him into difficulty.

◀◀ July 2, 1937

Johnson is unconditionally released by Deland for "wild pitching" Johnson is 1-1 but has been relieved several times because of control problems.

August 14, 1937 ▶▶

A long way from the heady days of Fort Myers - less than 19 months after pitching with the Philadelphia Athletics in spring training, Johnson is relegated to sharing the lead billing with Miss Virginia Linkous as both are slated start on the mound for Clinchco (Va.) in a Lonesome Pine League doubleheader against Lynch Station.

April 1939

Released outright by the Augusta Tigers of

the South Atlantic (B) League, Johnson signs with the Bona-Allen Shoemakers, one of the nation's top semi-pro teams in Buford, Georgia, a factory town located about 40 miles northeast of Atlanta.

June 18, 1941

Johnson is inducted in the United States' Army Air Corp.

1943

Lieutenant Johnson is stationed at Louisiana's DeRidder Army Air Base.

March 29, 1961

Suffering from Hodgkin's Disease, Johnson passes away at the age of 45 at George Washington Hospital in the District of Columbia.

League Will Play Twin Bill Sunday

CLINCHCO, Va., Aug. 14.—Special interest is attached to the Lonesome Pine League doubleheader scheduled here between Clinchco and Lynch Sunday afternoon, the first game beginning at 2 o'clock, because of the fact that Walter Johnson, Jr., son of the former major league star, and Miss Virginia Linkous, outstanding feminine pitcher, will appear on the mound for the local team, as starting pitchers. Miss Linkous has appeared previously this season in a Lonesome Pine League game. This will be young Johnson's first appearance in this section.

HIS RESERVED SEAT IS PRESIDENT HARDING'S KNEE.



The center of interest in this picture is Walter Johnson, Jr. son of the famous Washington baseball